



Behold
An Artful MDPC Advent

Bridget Wolk
2024

2024 Devotional





And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only
begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

-John 1: 14 (NKJV)

We stand at the edge of Advent with so much to see...so much to behold. The story of the coming of the Son of God is at once familiar, and shockingly fresh in its audacity. Angels appear. A young virgin conceives and so does her geriatric relative. A dazzling star guides far-off God-seekers. The very skies ring out with song. Proud kings kneel before a helpless baby. The young family of the Christ child faces mortal danger and flees for their lives.

We know the story so well that we can easily miss its glory. But what if we could see it anew? What if we could refresh our vision and—through the spoken word, the written word, soaring music, and beautiful art—behold it all as if for the first time?

This season, MDPC invites you and your family to see and celebrate an artful Advent. This devotional guide contains Bible readings and resources for each week of Advent, plus entries for Christmas, and Epiphany. Access the QR codes to hear music curated especially for this Advent season. Read the scriptures together as a family or in your personal times of devotion. Let the images draw you into prayer, or simply use them as reminders of the beauty of the Biblical story. And of course, you are invited to visit the MDPC campus often throughout the season for special holiday events or to simply enjoy drop-in moments together with others in The Nook.

Our prayer is that you will behold—in new and old ways—the good news of the coming of Christ Jesus, whose presence changes everything.

And the angel said unto them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2: 10-11

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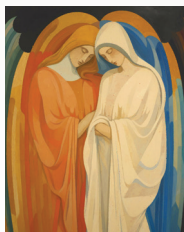


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The News

Matt. 1: 18-25 | Luke 1: 26-38

“Breaking news” is a regular occurrence these days.

It seems our every hour is filled with flashing alerts, urgent announcements, “this-just-in” headlines. But the most important event in human history began with two very personal bits of news, each delivered to a single individual by an angel.

Mary, a young woman of Nazareth, a virgin engaged to be married to Joseph, was visited by the angel Gabriel, whose “good news” must have seemed shocking at first. “Don’t be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a Son,” the angel said. And no ordinary Son! This Child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, a King who would reign forever, called “the Son of God.” Mary agreed, and it was done.

When Mary’s pregnancy became known, her fiancé Joseph also received news from an angel. “Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit.” Then the angel instructed Joseph not to put Mary quietly away but stand by her for the birth of a Child who would “save His people from their sins.”

Stunning news. Complicating news. Life-changing news. And not just for this young Jewish couple, but for every generation, tribe, and nation to follow! The news delivered privately to Mary and Joseph is no secret anymore. Christ has come. Sometimes big news starts small.

CONSIDER THIS

What is the best news you’ve received recently? How was it shared?

Matt. 1: 18-25

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

- ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus.
- ³² 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,
- ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”
- ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”
- ³⁵ 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.
- ³⁶ 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.
- ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”
- ³⁸ 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 I: 26-38

- ¹⁸ 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.
- ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
- ²⁰ 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.
- ²¹ She will bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”
- ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
- ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His Name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).
- ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,
- ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a Son. And he called His Name Jesus.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

- "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,"
John Mason Neale 1851



Spotify Playlist



Prayer

Almighty God, like our spiritual ancestors before us, we are hungry for good news. We long to hear reports of Your Kingdom's coming—of sin's captives released, of sight given to those who are blind to Your grace, of those enslaved by the evil systems of this world forever set free. We celebrate the first advent of Your Son as our great Rescuer and look forward to His return as Judge and King of all creation. Until then, make us carriers of the great good news of the gospel every day and in every way, confident that Your love endures forever. Amen.





The Journeys

Luke 1: 39-45; 2: 1-5

It's hard to imagine a world with no text messaging, Facetimeing, DMs, VMs, What's App, or even an "old-fashioned" speed dial. But once, the best way to communicate with someone was to get face-to-face and, often, that involved travel. The story of the coming of Jesus involved such journeys.

Mary traveled to share the news of her pregnancy with her aunt Elizabeth (and found out that Elizabeth had some stunning news of her own). Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem—with her nine-months pregnant—to fulfill a tax obligation imposed by Rome. Neither journey would have been easy, but both ended in blessing. Mary and Elizabeth shared in one another's prenatal joy, "introducing" two cousins-to-be whose messages would change the world. And in Bethlehem, two weary travelers welcomed their firstborn Son, who was Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

CONSIDER THIS

Do you enjoy travel?
Can you describe a
favorite destination?
What has made it
special to you?



Luke 1: 39-45

- ³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,
⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.
⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,



- ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb!
- ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come
to me?
- ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby
in my womb leaped for joy.
- ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of
what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Luke 2: 1-5

- ¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the
world should be registered.
- ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town.
- ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to
Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was
of the house and lineage of David,
- ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

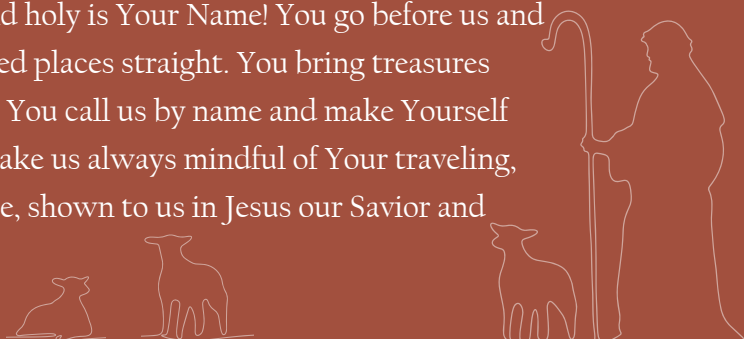
Luke 1: 48-55

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for He who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.
And His mercy is for those who fear Him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
He has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has helped His servant Israel,
in remembrance of His mercy,
as He spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to His offspring forever."

- Mary's Song of Praise: *The Magnificat*

Prayer

Everlasting Father, You are the true end of every worthwhile journey. Even when we set out unsure, or confused, or frightened of what the way might hold, You are ever with us, behind us, and before us. You have done great things for us, and holy is Your Name! You go before us and make our crooked places straight. You bring treasures out of darkness. You call us by name and make Yourself known to us. Make us always mindful of Your traveling, go-with-us grace, shown to us in Jesus our Savior and Lord. Amen.



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The Arrival

Luke 2: 1-7

“Are we there yet?” What parent hasn’t heard these words bleated from the backseat of a car? We hardly embark on any journey before we’re itching for our arrival. Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem right on time. How do we know? Because Paul writes in Galatians, “But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

The time came for God to send His Son. The time came for Mary to give birth. Only God knew the hour, but the hour arrived—and what an arrival it was even though there was no room at the inn. C. S. Lewis wrote that “Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.”

CONSIDER THIS

What keeps you hopeful as you wait for an anticipated arrival? How can the right-on-time arrival of Jesus encourage you in the time between hope and having?



Luke 2: 1-7

- ¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.
- ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town.
- ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,
- ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.
- ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.
- ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel



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- "O Little Town of Bethlehem," Phillips Brooks 1868



Prayer

O Christ our Prince of Peace, Your birth at Bethlehem causes us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth. You were born in a stable but worshipped by the angels. Your arrival here was humble, but You have always been a King. You are Alpha and Omega, beginning and end; You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Give us joy this Advent as we celebrate Your first coming and anticipate Your coming again, and accept our heartfelt praise to You, our Savior and Eternal King. Amen.





The Celebration

Luke 2: 8-15

You know it's a celebration when even the heavens rejoice. Jesus's birth was an event-planner's envy. Angels appeared. A heavenly choir sang. The glory of God was displayed around those "in the same region," shepherds doing shepherd-things on what must have begun as a night like other nights. But it wasn't. Not at all.

It was impossible for the world to receive the gift of the Christ child without celebration. The celebration completed the gift. On that night, God's creation praised God's incarnation. And the display of God's glory spurred the shepherds to action. "Let us go and see," they said. Did they leave their sheep under others' care, or take them along on the journey to Bethlehem? We don't know. But after what God made known to them, they had to see the gift for themselves.

CONSIDER THIS

What is the best celebration you've ever been a part of?
Who or what was it for? What made it special?



Luke 2:8-15

- ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
- ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.
- ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
- ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
- ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."
- ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
- ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"
- ¹⁵ 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."



Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

- "Joy to the World," Isaac Watts 1719



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PRAYER

O God who gave us Jesus, give us joy in Him! Stir our hearts to praise You for Your “indescribable gift,” and make us glad with the “good news of great joy for all people.” Then let us “repeat the sounding joy” of all creation, that is still singing with the goodness of a God who has come to us and is with us forever. Amen.





The Family

Luke 2: 15-20

At the heart of the Christmas story is a family. There might be a nativity scene without an extra sheep or two or a spare wise man or shepherd, but there is no “O holy night” without the Son of God and His two earthly parents. God didn’t initiate His Kingdom with a full-grown and glorious King. He placed a tiny, vulnerable infant in the care of two humble and willing humans and tasked them with nurturing their own Creator! And He did this with a much larger family in mind: “For consider what He has done—before the foundation of the world He chose us to become, in Christ, His holy and blameless children living within His constant care. He planned, in His purpose of love, that we should be adopted as His own children through Jesus Christ...”

CONSIDER THIS

Describe your present family or your family of origin. What are/were the benefits of being a member of this family? What are/were some of the challenges?



Luke 2:15-20

- ¹⁵ 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.”
- ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Baby lying in a manger.
- ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this Child.
- ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.
- ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.
- ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring Him laud
The Babe, the Son of Mary.



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~ "What Child Is This?" William C. Dix 1865

PRAYER

O Father who places us in families,
we praise You for making us a part
of Your forever family through Your
Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
We are the sons and daughters of
our earthly parents by birth, and
Yours by adoption. Thank You for
making a way for us to belong to the
family of God. Help us to be rooted
and established in Your love, so that
we might "have power, together
with all the Lord's holy people, to
grasp how wide and long and high
and deep is the love of Christ, and
to know this love that surpasses
knowledge—that [we] may be filled
to the measure of all the fullness of
God." Amen.







The Magi

Matthew 2: 1-23

The magi were the gift-givers of the Christmas story. They didn't arrive before the Christ child empty handed. They traveled with their treasures and bestowed those treasures on the tiny King they sought and found. They worshiped and they gave. Then the story became more complicated. The wise men had promised King Herod they would return to him with news of the Child. But they were warned by angels not to do so, and "departed to their own country by another way." Mary and Joseph, also warned by an angel, did not go home to Nazareth at all, but fled to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod's jealous wrath. No one who was a part of this ancient gift exchange would leave it as they came.

CONSIDER THIS

What is the best gift you've ever given? The best gift you've ever received? What made each so memorable?



Matthew 2: 1-23

- ¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,
- ² saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him."
- ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;
- ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
- ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:
- ⁶ "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"
- ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.
- ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him."

- ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the Child was.
- ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.
- ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.
- ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.
- ¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the Child, to destroy Him.”
- ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt
- ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”
- ¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.
- ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:
- ¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”
- ¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
- ²⁰ saying, “Rise, take the Child and His mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.”
- ²¹ And he rose and took the Child and His mother and went to the land of Israel.
- ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.
- ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that He would be called a Nazarene.



What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.



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- "In the Bleak Midwinter," Christina Rossetti 1872

Prayer

God, we have nothing to give that is not already Yours. But You have not demanded our hearts or conscripted our love. You've only ever offered us Your own. You have demonstrated Your love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. May we return love to You this season not out of obligation, but out of deep, deep joy and gratitude. We love because You first loved us. Amen.



An **MDPC** *Holiday!*



Mission Market Christmas Cards

Dec 1-23

Honor a loved one while blessing a ministry here in our community or across the globe. You choose the dollar amount to give and the recipient.



Blue Christmas Service

Thu, Dec 5 • 6-7:30pm • Sanctuary Courtyard

This contemplative and interactive service, led by Beth Case, is for both the merry and the not-so-merry. Join with others as we prepare for the season ahead!



Family Christmas Festival

Sun, Dec 8 • 3:30-5:30pm • Parking Lots A-C

Join us for an outdoor Christmas season celebration! Bring your whole family to enjoy a petting zoo, inflatables, live music, games, crafts, and more! The Festival is free and all are invited. Please bring canned fruit to support the MDPC Fuente Food Pantry.



Christmas Concert

Sun, Dec 8 • 6-7:30pm

Stick around after the festival for another fantastic seasonal event in the Sanctuary: Our annual Christmas Concert, featuring the MDPC Choir and a 40-piece orchestra. Admission is free!



Christmas Eve Services

Contemporary Service • 2pm • Sanctuary

Contemporary worship with the MDPC praise band

Family Service • 4pm • Sanctuary

Energetic, kid-friendly, and interactive

Candlelight Services • 5:30, 7, 8:30pm • Sanctuary

Traditional worship with full choir, organ, and a chamber orchestra

Experience the Nativity Petting Zoo! Open 3:30-8pm.

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