



Spiritual Practices for Advent

God's hospitality made known to us in Jesus





Joining Jesus: Spiritual Practices for Advent

In Advent, God's hospitality is made known to us in Jesus.

The familiar Advent stories are full of the unexpected - the angel's visit to Mary, Elizabeth's baby leaping in his mother's womb, night-time journeys and disrupted plans, people waiting in the darkness full of fear and foreboding, Magi arduously searching for a king.

In these stories, God in Jesus doesn't give hospitality, doesn't reach out to the stranger, doesn't offer help. In Jesus, God is the One who receives hospitality; God is the stranger, the helpless one in need of assistance. Is Jesus inviting us to be vulnerable, let others welcome us, and allow ourselves to receive hospitality this Advent season and beyond?

While there's wonder and joy in giving hospitality, Advent reverses our expectations of what it means to be God's people. We want to explore this strange hospitality.

The following pages include simple questions for reflection and ways to respond as we prepare for the coming of Christ.

We want to discern how and where we might become vulnerable to being welcomed by others. This is what God was doing in Jesus. Emmanuel, God-with-us, became utterly vulnerable, needing to be taken care of, swaddled, fed, held, and tenderly loved.

Come Lord Jesus, Come.

Advent Spiritual Practices

Each of the four weeks of Advent focuses on a theme related to hospitality.

1. Paying attention with humility and grace
2. Encountering the Spirit at work in hopeful unexpected ways
3. Being “out of place” is ok
4. Responding to invitation and disruption

Each of these themes comes from a familiar Advent scripture. Here is what you can expect to do each week:



Reflecting: For each week, there are some questions for reflection to accompany the scripture passage (see below for guidance).



Responding: Try out some suggested ways of responding as you go about your everyday, seasonal activities. These actions are intended to be simple and flexible. They are not tied to specific days or weeks but hopefully will inspire you to be open to receiving God’s hospitality this Advent season.



Sharing: An invitation to share what you are learning and experiencing on our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/joiningjesus/>.

Reflecting on Scripture

Each of the four scripture passages are intended to guide you in your reflection over the week.

Try out the following practice as many times as you want to throughout each week:

- Find a quiet place.
- Read through the text, underlining words or phrases that stand out to you.
- Spend a few minutes in silence.
- Read slowly through all the words and phrases you underlined a few times. What is your attention being drawn to?
- Take some time to make some notes on the “Reflecting” questions for each scripture passage.



Paying Attention with Humility and Grace

Scripture

Luke 1: 26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." ³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called[b] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail." ³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

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Reflect

Although she is in her own home, Mary is not in control of this encounter. Read the passage again and reflect upon how Mary receives this strange guest with perplexing news.

Describe what you learn about who God is through this encounter. What words, questions or observations come to mind for you?

Respond



Advent can sometimes feel like an “out of control” time with music concerts, shopping, entertaining, increased spending and family obligations (to name just a few examples!). What would it look like to practice the posture of Mary this season - openness, humility and grace ready for disruptive invitations from the Holy One?

1. Choose an event or gathering that is already in your agenda. This could be something regular to your routine (fitness class, grocery shopping, office lunch, etc.) or something connected with Advent.
2. Commit to giving this event your full attention while you are there, not worrying about what’s next on your list of things to do or places to be. Pay attention to what is going on around you.
 - Who is there?
 - How are they behaving?



3. Take some time to reflect on what you learned about yourself and others by being intentional about being fully present and paying attention.

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WEEK 2

Encountering the Spirit at work in Hopeful, Unexpected Ways

Scripture

Luke 1: 39-45

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

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Reflect



Read the passage again and take some time to reflect on all that is “unexpected” in this passage. How is God faithfully continuing to show up and in hopeful, unexpected ways?



When have you been surprised by the Spirit of God? What happened? How did this impact your life? How does this experience continue to shape your own faith and expectation of God at work around you?

Respond



A part of the challenge of receiving hospitality from others is that we are not in the driver's seat. We are dependent on others. It is often in encounters with others - outside our own imagination and expectation - that God blesses us with words of encouragement, joy and hope.

1. Throughout the season of Advent, look out for opportunities to try something new or be with someone different. If someone unexpected reaches out to you, take time to connect with them.
2. Take some time to reflect on how you might have experienced God through this experience.



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Being “out of place” is OK

Scripture

Luke 2: 1-7

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

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Reflect



This passage is about place; it’s about the location in which God vulnerably comes to receive the protection of others. Read the passage again and take some time to notice the words, images and feelings that come to mind.



Reflect upon your own “place” (where you live). Are there places, people, groups in your neighbourhood or community that you tend to avoid? Why these?

As you continue to meditate on the passage, how does the way you see these places shift?

Respond



Find a new place to spend some time. This could be a different coffee shop, a different grocery store or any kind of place where you don't usually go.

- What do you notice?
- What assumptions did you have coming in that were affirmed?
- What assumptions turned out to be incorrect?



Take some time to reflect on how it made you feel to be in this unfamiliar space.

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Responding to Invitation and Disruption

Scripture

Luke 2: 8-20

⁸ *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

⁹ *Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth 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 heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”*

¹⁵ *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

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Reflect

The shepherds were going about their usual business when the multitude of angels appeared. They dropped everything and went to see what was happening in Bethlehem.

When was a time when you dropped everything you were doing in order to respond to a compelling message that appeared out of the blue?

How did responding impact you?

Respond



Invitations can be obvious or subtle. They can be to an event or even to a simple conversation.

1. Throughout Advent look out for invitations from others. When they come along, say “yes” and wonder about what God might be revealing to you about receiving hospitality from others.
2. Take some time to reflect on how you might have experienced God through this experience.



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