

AWAITING THE ALREADY
Advent Worship Series – Week 2
The World as It Is
December 6, 2020
The Expectation of Hope Candle

Lighting of Advent Candle

Reader 1: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.’” (Jeremiah 33:14-16, NIV)

[Light first (purple) candle]

Reader 2: We relight the candle of Preparation of Peace, remembering the voice crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

[Light second (purple) candle]

Reader 1: Today, we light the candle of Expectation of Hope. May it remind each and every one of us of God’s great promise to us. He is our hope, He is our Redeemer, and He is our Savior.

Prayer: Father, during the Advent season may we be reminded of your promises to us and your fulfillment of them. Help us to prepare our lives for His Advent within us. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Joseph

Responsive Reading:

Reader 1: The Gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus. Following this, Matthew provides us Joseph’s point of view, revealing his perspective through a sympathetic lens.

All: ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

Reader 2: Matthew calls Joseph “a righteous man.” Like Noah, Job, and others in the Bible before him, Joseph faced suffering despite doing and saying all the right things. We cannot help but ask the question on his behalf: “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

All: ²⁰ But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Reader 1: The angel’s message is simple but powerful: “Don’t be afraid...” It is a word of frank challenge rather than false hope. It is, on the one hand, an acknowledgment of all that has happened to Joseph and Mary, a recognition that fear is an understandable response. But it is also a call to resistance, and a refusal to let the trauma of external circumstances consume Joseph with fear and disillusionment. Then there is a promise:

All: ²¹ “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Reader 2: What’s remarkable about these words is that the angel provides no proof that what he says is true. Joseph, noble and righteous Joseph, has a choice: Take the angel at his word and do the difficult thing, or buckle to the pressures of prevailing culture and do what is expedient.

All: ²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” ²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Reader 1: Joseph introduces one of the central themes of Matthew: We must choose to follow Jesus, especially when it is costly to do so. We must stay focused on the daily choices, the everyday challenges, that have at stake our allegiance to Christ.

*(Awaiting the Already, pp. 33-35;
Matthew 1:18-25, NASB)*

Herod

Reader 1: It is compelling to note that with all the favorite characters we associated with the birth of Jesus—Mary, shepherds, angels, Elizabeth, Zechariah—

Matthew focuses on only the magi, Joseph, and Herod. History paints a very dark picture of Herod the Great.

All: ¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”

Reader 2: ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

All: ⁶ ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”

Reader 1: ⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”

All: ⁹ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Reader 2: ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him.

All: Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

Reader 1: Herod orders all baby boys in Bethlehem to die, determined to defeat this threat to his throne with violence. Indeed, the backdrop of Matthew is one littered with fearful, menacing forces, all threatening to life. And while Matthew invites us to consider the connection between Herod, it is permissible to think about the gloomy world Matthew portrays and its similarities to our own.

Reader 2: Matthew would not want us to use the imminent arrival of Jesus to escape from the miseries of this world, but to confront them squarely in the face. In fact, Matthew would not only discourage us from finding Jesus apart from our world, or apart from

our time; he would invite us to find the presence of Jesus right in the midst of the world, right now.

(*Awaiting the Already*, pp. 35-37;
Matthew 2:1-12, NASB)

Advent 2020 – Week 2	
DRAMA Fight or Flight? By Martyn Scott Thomas © Copyright 2019 by Martyn Scott Thomas. All rights reserved. Used by permission.	
Topic:	Obedience, Persecution
Scripture:	Matthew 2:13-18
Synopsis:	Joseph tells of his family's flight to Egypt.
Characters:	Joseph – the father of Jesus
Props/Costumes:	Biblical or modern dress.
Setting:	Bare stage.
Running time:	2 minutes

[Joseph enters quietly, looking around cautiously.]

Joseph: Well, I think they're finally asleep. It's been a long day and we have even longer days ahead. The past few days, weeks, months have been a blur, and I'm still trying to process everything, but I'll do whatever it takes to keep this child safe.

The first visit of the angel seems like a lifetime ago, but I'll never forget his words: "Do not be afraid . . ." *[aside]* If I knew then what I know now. But everything he told me came to be. Mary was indeed pregnant and gave birth to a son – God's son – and we gave him the name Jesus. Even so, the angel's words didn't fully prepare us for all that would follow.

Starting with the journey to Bethlehem for the census, the shepherds at the manger with their incredible story, and even later the visit of the Magi, there was no way for us to know what else God had in store for us. If we did, we probably would be afraid.

But I've found out that God will prepare us for what's next; not necessarily everything that's next, but at least for what is immediately in front of us. All I need to do is listen and obey. That brings me to the latest visit of an angel.

Last night, in a dream, an angel appeared to me and said, "Get up and flee to Egypt with the child and his mother. Stay there until I tell you to return, for Herod is going to try to kill the child." Strangely, he didn't tell me not to be afraid. I guess there would be no point in that. Knowing how accurate the angel was the first time, I knew I had no choice but to obey. If even half the stories I've heard about Herod are true, our family is in grave danger. So immediately, we packed up all we could carry and started the long journey.

So, we're on our way to Egypt and I'm keeping my guard up. It's slow going, travelling with a child, but we're making steady progress and I don't think we're being followed. I know God will provide for us, but I'm making sure I do my part in all of this. And sometimes my part is just to be obedient.

[Blackout]

AWAITING THE ALREADY
Advent Children's Moment – Week 2
December 6, 2020

Going Away for Christmas
by Martyn Scott Thomas

[Call the children of the congregation forward and have them sit around the Narrator's chair.]

Narrator: Today is the second week of Advent – the four weeks before Christmas. For the next few weeks we're going to talk about different parts of the Christmas story. Last week, we talked about getting ready for Christmas. Today, we're going to talk about going away for Christmas.

How many of you have ever been away from home for Christmas? [get responses from the children] Where did you go? [get responses from the children] How did you get there? [get responses from the children] Did you like being away from home for Christmas? [get responses from the children]

Do any of you remember where Jesus was born? *[get responses from the children]*
[in a manger, in Bethlehem] Good answers. Yes, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and rather than move back to their home, Mary and Joseph decided to stay in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. But then something happened.

When Jesus was around two years old, the three wise men came to visit him and his parents. They brought him gifts and worshipped him. But when they left, an angel came to see Joseph and told him that they need to go to Egypt quickly, because an evil king wanted Jesus dead.

So, Joseph took Mary and Jesus in the middle of the night and they travelled to Egypt, where they would be safe. Do you think it was easy to make that trip? Do you think they wanted to move away from their new home? Why do you think they went? *[get responses from the children]*

God made sure that they would be safe. And if we trust him, he will always make sure that we're safe, too.

Let's pray. Dear Jesus, we thank you that you are always with us and that you always keep us safe, no matter where we are. We ask that you be with us during this Christmas season and watch over us. Bless us today. Amen.

I'll see you back here next week. *[dismiss the children]*

AWAITING THE ALREADY
Advent Sermon – Week 2
The World as It Is
December 6, 2020

By Captain Kristina Sjögren

Title: *The World as It Is*

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-2:12

Now that we're in the second week of Advent, there is no doubt that you have noticed all of the commercialism that comes with the Christmas season. In fact, Christmas items have been in the stores before Halloween! And then there's the 24/7 Christmas music stations on the radio, playing since November 1st. That is too early, and it seems to be getting earlier every year. It makes me wonder why.

Besides money, perhaps the culture around us would like for us to believe that our regular lives are somewhat "put on hold" while we go about spreading cheer and tidings of great joy to people. And I'm pretty sure that advertisers would like for us to believe that the happiest time on earth is during Christmas. It puts us in the mood to purchase things, doesn't it?

But for some people, that is not the case. There is heartache, grief, brokenness, and perhaps reminders of the past. Real life actually continues. Life's tough moments don't stop with a Christmas song or with shopping therapy. Perhaps you or someone you know have experienced a loss this year and are facing difficult times this season.

Of course, as Christians we have a reason to be joyful at Christmas. We understand and anticipate what we know to be true, the birth of our Savior and Lord! But there's still potential for a feeling of conflict within our hearts as life doesn't always go the way we plan or desire.

As we explore Matthew's gospel, we will encounter a story that is quite the opposite of a "glamorized" picture of Christmas. Matthew speaks of a story that is more in line with reality. In fact, the story he tells looks as if it comes straight from headline news of our times.

Like any good story that might be plastered across the front-page (or front-screen news in today's term), the story of Jesus' birth in Matthew is one of scandal; it even has a villain.

As we explore the beginning of Matthew's story today, we will look at a few important characters and settings which impact the Advent story as we know it. But more importantly, we will see just how present Jesus our Immanuel is—here and now—in all of our lives and in every circumstance.

First, let's take a look at Joseph. This guy who is called a "righteous man" (Matthew 1:19) goes through a pretty traumatic experience in his life when he receives the announcement that his fiancée, Mary, is going to have a baby that is not biologically his. I imagine he hears this news with shock and has to decide what to do next.

This news was actually a pretty big deal for a godly couple like Mary and Joseph who were engaged to be married. The news of unfaithfulness would have been extremely humiliating and could be dangerous for Mary, as women were killed for this sort of betrayal.

If tabloid news was around in first-century Palestine, this story of Joseph and Mary would have been a story worth reading about, especially in this little town called Bethlehem. Talk about gossip worth spreading!

It's interesting that we don't actually see Mary's side of the story in Matthew—that's up to Luke to tell. Matthew provides us with Joseph's point of view and how this righteous man navigates through a bad situation.

When we consider our world as it is today, we understand that the righteous (like Joseph) actually do suffer at times. There is nothing about our relationship with, and commitment to, God that makes us immune to trials, heartache, and disappointment in our lives. No matter how hard we try, we are subject to injustices and oppression in our time.

But take a look at verse 20. The angel says, *"Do not be afraid."* The angel doesn't simply say, "Good news," or "things will be better," or "it's the most wonderful time of the year." He admits there is a challenge ahead and maybe some fear, but it seems as if the angel is calling Joseph to resist from letting this trauma create fear in him that could radically change the course of his life and so many others.

As Matthew reminds us of the reality of a broken world, we also experience this sense of awaiting the already by the promise that the angel shares with Joseph. Verse 21 says, *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* And in verse 23, *"...They are to call him Immanuel (which means, "God with us")."*

In Greek, Immanuel is translated: *Im* – "with," *Anu* – "us," *El* – "God" [עִמָּנוּאֵל]. For the Jew especially, this was much anticipated news! Verse 22 states, *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet."*

The angel is providing a choice to Joseph. He can either take the angel's word as truth and do the difficult thing (which would be to preserve Mary's life and put his own reputation on the line by remaining with her), or he can save his own reputation and divorce her quietly.

Of course, we know that Joseph chooses to remain with Mary and raise Jesus together. But, think about how complex Joseph's decision actually is. In his culture he may have been tempted to lean toward what society would expect of him, and that would be to punish Mary for her unfaithfulness. But Joseph takes the high road and listens to the angel's message even though it was harder to do.

What does that mean for us this second week of Advent 2020? Well, I believe that in our lives we have many opportunities to choose whom we will follow: the culture/world around us, or Jesus Christ. When we experience tough situations (and we will) or situations that may require us to take

the high road by relying on God's wisdom, how do we typically respond? Do we take the easy road that culture would have us take, or do we stand firm with the truth of God in our lives?

Let's move on in our story to Matthew 2. So far, this is a good story. But every good story needs a villain, someone who provides tension and rhythm to keep the audience engaged. In Matthew, that villainous person is King Herod who is in stark contrast to Joseph who is obedient and trusting of God's plan. Herod wants to direct his own destiny.

This part of the story also has parallels with one of the Old Testament's villains: Pharaoh. The readers of Matthew would know of Pharaoh from generations before them. Both of these men were tyrannical rulers who ran their kingdoms with a heavy hand and who lived with the paranoia that their power would eventually be taken.

In fact, King Herod was so paranoid about losing his power that he even saw his own sons as a threat to the point of having them executed.

So, how do we compare the fearful and threatening forces in those days, to today's society and the gloomy world that is around us?

Of course, we don't live in a country where we are in fear for our lives because of a Pharaoh or a Herod who are known enemies of God's people. But we do live in a culture that can distract us from seeing God and realizing that Jesus is in the midst of everything with His grace and love. Perhaps it will help us to think of it this way.

In the midst of this world and all of its distractions and problems, Matthew invites us to remember that Immanuel has come. He is already here and is willing to come alongside us, restore us, and bring us fullness of life.

Now consider putting the faithfulness of Joseph and the selfishness of Herod together. What you get is a realistic picture of situations that actually happen in life. This could be a picture of our current situation in this world. Along with the promise of God's constant work in us, we discover solid ground for living a life without fear, especially when we encounter threatening or troubling times in our life. **Immanuel. God with us.**

Like Joseph's life, our lives can be filled with ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, without any warning. There is no predictability for our lives, but we as humans usually long for what lies ahead. It's kind of like celebrating Christmas beginning on October 31st! Sometimes we even try to live in the "good old days" while we avoid the realities of what's going on around us.

Really, all we have for sure is the here and now. I believe Joseph's story teaches us about not fearing for tomorrow or dwelling on the past but focusing on what we have at this moment in time. Remember, **Immanuel, God with us**, in every moment.

In this world as it is, we have a beautiful birth narrative to remind us that no matter what we might be going through, God is in it and He is with us.

Methodist theologian Adam Clarke stated it this way: “In what sense then, is Christ, GOD WITH US? Jesus is called Immanuel, or **God with us**, in his incarnation; **God with us**, by the influences of his Holy Spirit, in the holy sacrament, in the preaching of his word, in private prayer. And **God with us**, through every action of our life, that we begin, continue, and end in his name. He is **God with us**, to comfort, inform, protect, and defend us, in every time of temptation and trial, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment; and **God with us** and in us, and we with and in him, to all eternity.”

One more important thought as we close today. The names “Immanuel” and “Jesus” direct us to a great truth about the Christian life. As His name implies, the very purpose of Jesus coming to earth was to save us from our sins. But being saved is not something that only happens at the moment we accept Jesus into our lives. Living as saved people is living daily as followers of Jesus.

The name Immanuel speaks of the purpose of being saved. It is that we would live in personal relationship with God. The real meaning and purpose of salvation is nothing if we do not live day by day, experiencing **Immanuel, God with us**.

How about us today? Do we live like God is with us? Think about what would have happened if Joseph had not trusted in the angel’s proclamation and understood that God was, and would continue to be, with him? And we didn’t even get into the rest of the story when Joseph and Mary would have to flee to Egypt in order to keep their family safe! But, Immanuel. God was with them.

Immanuel, God is with us. I pray today that as we have looked at a part of this portion together, God has gently reminded you that He is with you. He is in the midst of our lives in every moment.

I pray that we all come to really know the joy that comes in trusting God in the midst of all of the ups and downs of life, one moment at a time. **Immanuel, God with us.**