

## First Fifteen: December 20-24 Advent 4

### Monday: Luke 1:26-38

**Going Deeper:** The reassurance that God is on our side, more often than not, provides us with a deep sense of comfort and peace. These words that announce the incarnation, the coming of God to us in the birth of a son to a young virgin are familiar, and well loved. They invite us into the wonder that is Christmas... they encourage us to open our heart and lives to embrace a faith that nothing is impossible for God! I would also add... nothing is impossible with God as well, implying you and I are part of what God is doing. This is what we witness in Mary's willingness to embrace this message and trust that being favored by God was indeed a blessing! Mary's faith and trust in what God was doing took great faith. She was willing to let go of her own ideas for her future, her own desires for what she wanted... believing God's love and wisdom in this blessing was a gift. The gift of the coming of God to us in the birth of Jesus is unlike any other. This gift of God is an invitation to open your hands, heart, and mind... this act of faith, the reception of God's favor and love invites us to let go of whatever else we are carrying, trusting God's ways are better than our own.

**Prayer:** New every morning is your mercy Lord. Each new day holds within it opportunity, as well as challenge. Lord I trust your blessing and your favor will guide me today. Help me hold my plans loosely so I can respond to the opportunities and challenges of this day by faith. And by doing so help me know I am working with you in sharing the message of this season. Amen.

### Tuesday: Luke 2:1-7

**Going Deeper:** Making room for the unexpected is often part of our holiday with family and friends. We make our plans and preparations based upon our expectations, and then someone throws you a curve ball, the one thing you didn't see coming is now on your front doorstep. So... with your best holiday smile you say, "come on in!" Knowing full well you are going to have to make some last-minute alterations to plans and possibly send someone to the store to cover the unexpected. The wording we typically read in the translation of this story is of an innkeeper who has no more rooms, but the original text may also refer to an extended family household whose expectations didn't include the "favored" family in their plans. I suspect we have all experienced moments when our plans did not go as expected, whether we were the planner or the unexpected one, we know how it feels... The message of the incarnation is not about God removing the obstacles and the unexpected from our lives. The meaning of God as one of us affirms just that... God is with us in every situation, and we are not alone. No room in the inn, or a last-minute change, or news that takes our breath away... God is in the mix with us no matter what shows up on our doorstep. God makes no promise of clearing away the stuff of our lives, although if we are open to where God leads, we will always find a way to navigate through the unexpected... and ultimately find a place to rest our head.

**Prayer:** Lord of the unexpected help me to keep my thoughts and heart focused on the message you are with me... always. Help me trust the gifts you bring to me through the unexpected and unplanned moments of each day... knowing, trusting, believing through them you reveal to me your never-ending love and presence with me. Amen.

**Wednesday: Luke 2:8-20**

**Going Deeper:** Why shepherds? Ever wonder why God chose a gathering of shepherds to be the first to proclaim the news the Christ Child had been born? Luke's telling of the story of Jesus' birth is filled with God coming to the least expected... to those who were outside circles of power and influence... within the religious community, as well as the social/political/economic establishment. I understand this pattern both theologically, as well as personally. When we are in need, when we find ourselves on the outside looking in, when we realize we cannot do life on our own without help then we find ourselves looking for God. Although in this story I wonder if God's announcement might have had less to do with who they were vocationally, and instead came to the shepherds because they were looking... they were attentive and open to what God came to share with all of us. Being awake and aware, seeking God is not based upon what we have or don't have... these are qualities are God's desire all of us to possess. When we are open to learn, seeking to grow in our understanding of who God is and who we are in relation to God and others, it puts us in a place where God can reach us. When we are busy with our own agenda, making our plans based upon our needs and ideas does not mean God cannot reach us... it simply means God's presence is easier to miss.

**Prayer:** Lord of the heavens, whose message shines brightly for all to see... help me to look up, to be attentive and open to your signs and wonders. It is far too easy to get busy and become distracted, but even within my distractibility you come in love seeking to show me your mercy... calling to see where and how you want to be part of my life. O God who comes to me, who is with me, hear my prayer. Open my eyes, heart, and mind to you and all you desire for me. Amen.

**Thursday: Luke 2:15-20**

**Going Deeper:** *"And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."* (Luke 2:18-19 – NIV) I wonder if the place of amazement is in our head, when something just sounds too good to be true, or its magnitude just blows our mind. Whereas the place we treasure things, where we ponder them take place in our heart after it has been touched, or broken, or stirred so deeply we can hardly catch our breath. We need both to be engaged, our head and our heart as we consider what this gift of God is for us. God's willingness to become one of us stretches our mind while it also pulls at our heart. Is it possible? Could it really be true... God is one of us, God came to reveal the depth of God's love for us in such a tangible way so we could see with our eyes and hear with ears the words of light and life God has for you and for me... for all of us! I spent most of my childhood completely unaware of these stories of our faith, the birth of Jesus, and the coming of God to be one of... among us. As we celebrated Christmas, I heard the

story of the meaning of Christmas quite clearly each year as the “Charlie Brown Christmas” was broadcast in early December, but it wasn’t until my 16<sup>th</sup> Christmas that I began to ponder what it all meant. I had been and still can be awash in the wonder and amazement of it all, there have been times with all that was needed in all the preparations I had little time to simply take it all in... to treasure it’s meaning and ponder how God came to me... to you and to us. I encourage you to hear the stories, listen and allow yourselves to be drawn into them and let them lead you to places of wonderment allowing your heart to be stirred once again, treasuring these moments and this message that God has given to you, to us.

**Prayer:** God of wonder and love, touch my heart and stir my thoughts. As I prepare for the wonder of your coming help me not get lost in all that I hope to accomplish, trusting no matter what preparations are finished they will be enough. Help me to believe in all that we have done you have been part of it, using each task and moment to clear away the clutter so I am ready for your coming once again. Amen.

**Friday: John 1:1-5**

**Going Deeper:** It is Christmas eve... the time is upon us, and the only work left to do is simply trust the one who comes to us. But what are to trust really? That the God of all creation loves you... that the darkness of our world and at times our lives will not prevail... that the clarity of light is brighter and pierces the depth of even the deepest darkness...that the power of love is stronger than any force in the universe and it will not be overcome.... Quite frankly, yes! The words of John’s Gospel begin with an announcement about Jesus declaring that he is the living Word of God, that he was with God in the beginning and came to bring life and light for all of us. Notice he does not say Jesus said or used words that were life giving. John said Jesus was the Word meaning not merely the words he used, but the way he lived and shared his life from start to finish revealed the true, complete, whole nature of God. It is Christmas eve and the time us upon us... the only thing left to do is ask... what do I believe about the one who is comes to us and how will I respond to the gift that is given.

**Prayer:** Come Lord Jesus come. Come into my life and the lives of those I love. Come into the lives of those who are my neighbors, those I know as well as those I have not yet met. Come into the lives of all who will join me in worship tonight, fill our hearts and minds with light, wonder and love. Come Lord Jesus come into our community, nation and world with your Light that is brighter than our darkness... with your love that is stronger than our fears... and with your mercy which seeks to gather us all into your kind and tender heart. Come Lord Jesus come... to me. Amen.