



ADVENT GUIDE

02

WEEK TWO / AWAITING AN ADVENT **DECEMBER 4 – DECEMBER 10**

Scripture, in its most intriguing portions, often introduces an obscure character, gives him or her something profound to say or do, only to let that person mysteriously vanish from the text verses later. Simeon (Luke 2: 25-35) was one such shadowy figure, known only by his righteousness, devotion and apparent long-suffering for Israel's consolation. Imagine him as a gray-bearded saint – a John the Baptist type – full of the Spirit, groaning continually in the temple, waiting for the Messiah. Perhaps he'd stand post on the steps, looking out over the horizon, looking for a sign.

He certainly wasn't alone in his waiting. Countless others – the people of God from old – shared his anxious anticipation, and we too can sympathize. Most of us know the feeling well – desire builds when offered something spectacular, the prospects of some grand fortune, the opportunity to embark on some adventurous expedition, or the potential satisfaction of some unrequited love. With each new kernel of hope, the feeling swells in your heart. The uneasiness expands in your stomach. Israel lived on the edge of their seats, always looking out over the horizon.

The Prophets were to blame. Their continual reminders, their fanning the flame was necessary but agonizing. Certainly, we might think that the gods and goddesses of neighboring tribes – their asherah poles and stone altars readily available – could have consoled Israel. But how great was Israel's need – sins too many to atone with burnt sacrifices, oppression too heavy from violent enemies, shame too penetrating and peace so out of reach. Israel needed a Messiah, so they waited while the Prophets poked and prodded.

To those who longed to be righteous, Jeremiah thundered:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

The children of God rose in agreement....

To the oppressed who cried out for justice, Malachi encouraged:

And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. MALACHI 2:17-3:5

The children of God held their breath....

To those who needed freedom from shame, Zephaniah offered:

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame

and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,” says the LORD. ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20

The children of God let out a hopeful cry...

To all who waited for peace and security, Micah submitted:

Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace. MICAH 5:1-5

The children of God waited and waited, only to eventually rise again in agreement, hold their breath, and let out a hopeful cry. This continued for years.

This is the unsettling spirit of Advent, expectant waiting and preparation for the coming Christ, the consolation of God's people. Take some time to reflect personally on the bitterness and the sweetness of waiting.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Are you unsettled in your soul? Are you longing for righteousness, justice, freedom from shame, peace and security?

2. Does your waiting, longing and groaning debilitate you, or is it laced with hope? Read Romans 8:18-25, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 and Titus 2:11-14.

3. How does anticipation increase joy? Like a catchy hook in a song's melody, the building progression of each note rising slowly until it resolves and repeats, can we find pleasure in this anticipation? Read Lamentations 3:22-27 and Isaiah 40:27-31.

It's difficult to know how Simeon dealt with the rising anticipation, but we know he held fast to the promise. When the Spirit pressed, "And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26), Simeon sprung into action:

And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." LUKE 2:27-32

Oh, that we would wait so well, that we – this season – would rise in agreement, hold our breath, and let out a hopeful cry.

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

DECEMBER 4 – DECEMBER 10

There are many times in life when we have to wait for things – even good things. This can often be the case with God’s promises. Last week we saw an example of this very thing as Abraham and Sarah waited many years for their promised son, Isaac. God always keeps His promises, and He always keeps them perfectly. Trusting in that fact changes the way we endure seasons of waiting. We know that God uses times of waiting to increase and strengthen our belief, longing and the boldness of our asking. This was true as the people of Israel waited for the promised Messiah, and it is true for the people of God today.

Talk as a family about a time that it was hard to wait for something that had been promised to you. How did you feel? What was uncomfortable or difficult about the waiting?

As a family, spend time with God and in His Word. Read Isaiah 9:1-7 together. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah speaks about the Savior Whom had been promised, the One for Whom the people of God were waiting.

As a family, talk about the following questions:

1. Is there anything in this passage that you don’t understand? Are there any unfamiliar words?

2. What is the darkness that the people are walking in? What is the light that they will see?

3. What will be true of the promised Savior according to these verses?

4. How do you think the people of God felt as they heard and read these words?

5. Are there places in your life where you are waiting for God's faithfulness to a promise? What is this time of waiting like for you?

Close your time by praying as a family. Parents, ask your kids how you can be praying for them. Kids, ask your parents the same thing. This week think of ways you can encourage one another to keep trusting God's faithfulness even in times of waiting.

See Appendix C for a list of ideas for Family Activities.

*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.*

