



PREPARE HIM ROOM



DAILY EXHORTATIONS
FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

*A collection of Advent exhortations from Christ Church &
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DECEMBER 3 - He Surely Comes

TODAY is the first Sunday of Advent, our four Sunday countdown to Christmas. Advent means coming or arrival. And historically the church has celebrated all of the ways God has come to save His people, culminating in His great coming at Bethlehem, but also looking in hope to His final coming at the end to raise the dead at the final judgment and put all things right.

During these Sundays of Advent we use the *Definition of Chalcedon* as our Creed, which underlines the nature of Christ, that Jesus was both fully God and fully man, truly God and truly man, and that union of those two natures was utterly unique. That union did not blend or mix those two natures but preserves both of them in the one person of Jesus.

This union of God and man in Jesus underlines what we are celebrating in Advent. The chasm between Creator and creature is an infinite chasm. Man cannot cross it. Nothing in all of creation can leap from some finite point and arrive at infinite. Infinite, by definition, doesn't ever really arrive. And this is why if there is to be a bridge between God and man, it must come from the other side. The finite cannot reach the infinite, but the infinite can reach the finite. And this is what God has done in Jesus Christ.

This is the fundamental difference between Christianity and all other world religions. All the other religions, including secular humanism, teach that in some measure man can make progress across the infinite chasm to God and perfection. And this is why all the other religions of the world ultimately end in despair. They always begin with lies about man's potential for progress, and then when the truth begins to dawn that their progress is like Pooh and Piglet walking in circles in the snow, the only thing left is despair.

But Christianity is the only religion that has the audacity to tell the truth from the beginning: the truth that we are lost in our sins, that we are rebels, that our only potential in ourselves is darkness and death, and we couldn't make any progress across the chasm to God even if we wanted to. But the good news of Advent and Christmas and the whole Bible is that God has crossed the chasm to us. He has come for us. This is what we call grace, and this is the basis for all Christian hope. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. In all our darkness and hardship and struggle, He comes, He surely comes. And He will come again.

Toby Sumpter

DECEMBER 4 - Not a Stingy Wisdom

GOD has been kind enough to give us yet another Advent season, and so we should be resolved to live in it as true Christians. This means standing against the spirit of this age. This means learning what Scripture intends when it says that there is a way that seems right unto a man, and the end thereof is death (Prov. 14:12). What does this mean?

The unbelieving soul is incurably religious, and loves to pass on pious strictures as though God had been pleased to create a tiny universe, in order that He would have something to be stingy with. Is it really that easy for pious Christians to get God and the devil confused?

No, no, in Christ's name, no. We do not give anything up. We are privileged often to give things away, including ourselves, but that is another activity entirely. When you give things up you are acting like a son of the devil—he is the father of lies, and he started with you. The lie here is that God is a grinch.

When you give things away, they always come back to you—thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. When you give things away, there is a person on the other end, receiving. What you are giving is called a present. When you give presents, you are acting like God. When you give expensive presents, you are acting like God. When you give unreasonable presents, you are acting like God.

But when you give unreasonably like this, won't you run out? No... the one who supplies seed to the sower will continue to supply you with all you need (2 Cor. 9:10). This is why we should be dedicated to learning how to give in order to get, in order to give again. Wisdom is needed here, but it is never a stingy wisdom.

Douglas Wilson

DECEMBER 5 - Grief in a Time of Gladness

THE central message of our Christmas celebration is that of Good News of great joy for all nations: Christ has come. The centrality of joy should be unmistakable. But amidst all the joyful anthems, alongside all the favorite traditions, hiding in the corner of many otherwise joyful hearts is a pang of sorrow. The dull grief of loss is sharpened anew. The memory of past celebrations brings a fresh wave of mourning. The realization comes anew that their laugh will no longer be heard, their embrace no longer felt, their presence will no longer warm the room.

This is where the potency of the gospel shines brightest. For the Savior born in Bethlehem, as Isaiah foretold, would bear our griefs, carry our sorrows, and bring about the death of death. While the story is still in the telling, the ending is certain.

All your grief will soon melt into tears of glad rejoicing. All your sighs will give way to songs of triumph. All the nights of weeping shall break forth into an endless dawn of joy. The bitter bud of trials, will become the sweet fruit of sanctified glory. The darkest threads of the tapestry will give, from the distance of eternity, a deeper contrast to the whole.

The joy in all our sorrows is that God became a man and dwelt among us. He drank up the cup of our suffering to the very last dregs, so that you might drink only the finest of vintage from the cellar of His grace. Grace to comfort you in your most grievous trial. Grace to confirm you in your highest joys. Grace for the valley and the mountain. Indeed, our darkest sufferings are where this Good News of great joy shines the brightest.

Ben Zornes

DECEMBER 6 - Joy & Toil

ONE of the lies we are tempted to believe is that joy and toil can never be packaged in the same box. You can have joy on one day and toil on another. Or you can have gladness of heart at 2pm and dishes to do at 3pm. But you can't have a jolly spirit while scrubbing potatoes off of a fork, or scraping ice off your windshield, or clearing out an email inbox.

Man has forgotten what joy is for. And Ezra told us long ago, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh 8:10). So it is not only that joy and toil come in the same box. But you need joy if you would toil well. Labor without joy is vain pain. It is no wonder so many try to avoid it. In the other direction, joy without work is empty emotionalism masquerading like the real thing and doing absolutely no one any good.

The Christian faith announces not only that you must rejoice. It also announces that the joy you need has come to earth. Joy was wrapped in swaddling clothes. It laid in a manger.

Joy is not far from you. It is not out of your reach. Christ endured the cross for the joy set before him. And Paul is not saying that he had to endure the cross without joy in order to get to joy on the other side. He's saying that joy was set before him like a Christmas feast is set before you on the table. God prepared a table for him in the presence of his enemies. So it is with us. And we realize this by faith.

Jared Longshore

DECEMBER 7 - Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

DURING this festive season, I'm sure you will be finding yourselves singing many Advent hymns both in church, at various gatherings, and I trust with your families in your homes

The word "Advent" means *coming*, and so in church tradition this is a season of anticipation, as we in a sense look forward to, remember, and mark the coming of our Lord. And so the predominant theme then in our Advent hymns is that of desiring the Lord Jesus to *come*, such as in the Wesleyan classic, '*Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.*'

This longing for the Lord to come is a desperate desire for His saving presence. It is a cry for the Savior of the nations to enter into our sin-soaked world and to deliver us from our shame and misery.

But this longing for our Lord's coming must not be confined to tidy church calendars and liturgical seasons, useful as they are. Rather, it should be one of our foundational prayers throughout the year and in all circumstances. Our most fundamental need is for the Lord Jesus to come.

In every trial, in every temptation, in every moment of suffering – we need to earnestly turn to the Lord desiring for Him to break into our lives again and again. And the good news for you this morning is that this is exactly what He has done, and it is what He promises to do, until He appears again to judge the living and the dead.

So make this your earnest prayer. Make this the humble posture of your heart in this Advent season and throughout this next year:

*"Come, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee."*

Shawn Paterson

DECEMBER 8 - Two Kinds of Righteousness

JESUS came to save a dark and sinful world, but it was a world that thought itself glorious. And, to a certain extent, that glory was not a sham. The Lord Himself was tempted by it, when the glory of all the world's kingdoms was paraded before Him by the devil.

The world was grimy in the sight of God, but shiny and bright in its own eyes. This means that Jesus came to save us, not only from our sins, but also from our righteousness. Salvation from open sin was the comparatively easy part—persuading the prostitutes and tax collectors that they were sinful was a straightforward thing. But getting the message across to the theological hair-splitters was quite another thing.

We are declaring joy to the world. The greatest enemy to this hot joy from heaven is the cold and grim joy of self-righteousness. The two are mortal enemies, and can never be reconciled. The message of Christmas is that God has sent His Son to become mortal, so that He, the perfect, sinless one, might die a criminal's death, consigned to a wooden cross by the most respectable men alive. And there, to the end of the world, the gospel will tell us all that this event saved us all—the day when self-righteousness killed righteousness.

And in the wisdom of God, it was also the day when righteousness killed self-righteousness. This is the foundation of every possible joy, the only possible joy. This is the goodness of God, lavishly bestowed.

Douglas Wilson

DECEMBER 9 - Prepare Him Room

AS CHRISTIANS, we insist that because of Jesus all is grace. Holidays, perhaps like no other time, press us, inquiring whether it really is all grace. Holidays are gifts. They are feasts. They are mini-Sabbaths. They mean grace, rest, relief, laughter.

But there is something about grace piled up, grace overflowing, kindness unleashed that tempts people to grumble. Israel saw the wonders of God in Egypt, walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, and ate angel food in the wilderness, but God wasn't pleased with them because they complained and grumbled against God. So don't be surprised if grumbles, complaints, and side-long glances well up in your throat as you celebrate and prepare for the holidays this year. And don't be surprised if the temptations come wrapped in the form of pious sounding complaints: there's so much greed, commercialism, materialism, and what about all the starving orphans.

Of course there are other ways to sin during the holidays, but evil isn't overcome by evil. Having a bad attitude because some people are sinning is like pouring gasoline on a fire and pretending to be a fireman. You aren't helping at all. And frequently, the people you suspect of sin are really just enjoying the goodness of God and you can't handle the grace.

So this Advent, let every heart prepare Him room. Kill the complaints. Bury the bitterness. Fix your eyes on Jesus, Your Savior, who was born to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. That includes eggnog and candy canes, cancer and chemotherapy, trees and lights, flu bugs and teething toddlers, wrapping paper and prime rib, generous sacrificial gifts, hard work, late nights, hot chocolate, carols in the cold, and of course family and neighbors and those who in need with all their quirks and challenges.

Judas was the original Scrooge, and he betrayed our Lord because he didn't understand that God's grace was greater than all our sin. But Christ has come, and He will come again to turn this entire world into His Eternal Holiday, a Feast that will never end.

Toby Sumpter

DECEMBER 10 - Christmas in the Light

THE coming of Christ was like the dawning of the day. The Apostle John framed His coming this way, “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth” (1 Jn. 2:8). This was nothing less than what the Prophet Isaiah had foretold in his wonderful words, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isa. 9:2). “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee” (Isa. 60:1).

Christmas is the celebration of God opening the curtains, and exposing to mankind how dark indeed was the darkness in which we were living. He sent His Son, to be the light, in order to show us how to be truly human. Since His advent, we now live in the day, not in the dark.

Your sin cannot hide from God, so don't pretend it can. Your lies and evasions won't cloud the Son of Righteousness that has arisen. The church's task is to teach the world to live in the Light of Christ's glory. This is why we make a habit of confession of sins.

Christmas calls you to humble yourself, and confess your sins one to another. It summons you to curb your lusts by the power of the Spirit. You can no longer slink around in the dark alleys of spite, sloth, or slander. Christ's coming means that every hidden drawer, closet, and cave are bathed in His Kingdom's Light.

All the current convulsions of our culture are from its insane attempt to try to go back into the pre-Bethlehem darkness. But the powers and principalities are overthrown. Christ is King of this planet. We live in the Light, as He is in the Light, because He is the Light of the World.

Always remember, it is a mercy whenever your sin comes to light. You ought not think that keeping your sins hidden is for the best, or that it is even possible. We most certainly live in a time when rebellious men are attempting to bring the world back into shadow. But, whenever we avoid hard conversations, refusing to bring our sin into the Light, we have joined that foolish project of trying to live as if Christmas never happened. So as the Psalmist said, “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles” (Ps. 43:3).

Refusing to confess your sin is like trying to live in the White Witch's Christmas-less winter. But when you confess your sin to God, and to those you've sinned against, Christmas has indeed come.

Ben Zornes

DECEMBER 11 - Judgment vs. Judgmentalism

REGARDLESS of the common root, there is a world of difference between good judgment and judgmentalism. We must get the former while avoiding the latter.

Jesus addressed judgmentalism when he said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mt. 7:1). Now we all know that this passage is often twisted. The school teacher returns the quiz with four of the ten problems marked through with a red X. And the child says, “But, teacher, did not our Lord say, ‘Judge not.’” This is a perversion of the principle. But the routine twisting of this standard does not exempt us from obeying the untwisted standard. Our Lord said, “Judge not.” Stop condemning your brothers. Stop casting them into the outer darkness.

Jesus warned that the measure you use shall be used upon you. And you don’t have to wait around for this kind of thing to happen. Find a man who is judgmental of others and he will be just as judgmental of himself. He holds up condemnation-yard-stick no matter what he’s measuring. In its softer forms, we call it nitpicking. In its high octane forms, it is downright disdain. And we should put away all forms of it.

“But,” the judicialist responds, “Am I supposed to ignore the problem? They are not what they ought to be. I am not what I ought to be. The world itself is not what it ought to be.” The solution is not to ignore whatever is bent, broken, or out of place. The solution is to observe it and address it in light of the incarnation. Judgmentalism is judgment without the incarnation. And the incarnation is what will turn your judgmentalism into good judgment.

Christ saw what was deformed and he didn’t pick up a megaphone in heaven and shout down, “Shape up!” He came to us. He came to heal us and govern us like a Good Shepherd.

Jared Longshore

DECEMBER 12 - Which Ditch Beckons

GOD is the great giver of gifts. When we give things away in imitation of Him, we are learning how to become like Him. When we give things away with strings attached, we are becoming more and more like the devil, growing in the ways of manipulation.

We are in the shopping season for Christmas, and this is because it is a gigantic season for gift giving. And of course, much of it is a consumerist racket, with people in hot pursuit of Mammon and uninterested in celebrating the birth of the Christ child. Just because people are giving presents doesn't make anything godly. In Revelation, when God's two witnesses were finally killed, the unbelieving world celebrated by giving presents (Rev. 11:10). So let us hear the caution against materialism in Christmas.

But most of us need to hear the caution in the other direction more. Our celebration of the Incarnation is a celebration of the great event when God Himself gave Himself to us as a material present. Jesus took on a material body. He was born of a woman, born under the law, and gave that body to us, doing it for us. And so Christmas must not be materialistic, but it must be material.

Remember that the White Witch is the one who asks all the responsible questions about sustainability. When she came across a feast characterized by waste and conspicuous consumption, she said this: "What is the meaning of all this gluttony, this waste, this self-indulgence?"

And it was Judas who put on the responsible long face when all that precious ointment was wasted on Jesus. "Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" (Jn. 12:4-5). Judas was to betray Jesus, but it is to be noted that in this question, he was betraying Him already.

There is a ditch on both sides of the road. Take great care that you don't flatter your own propensities by misjudging which ditch beckons you.

Douglas Wilson

DECEMBER 13 - No Good Thing Lacking

“*GLAD* tidings of great joy” – we hear those words every year, and it can be tempting to let them roll off of us. Or maybe to think that they are talking about generic holiday cheer: days off from school and work — that’s “glad tidings of great joy.” Or perhaps you think of all the Christmas lights, and good food and gifts and family – all the trappings. But make no mistake. We decorate and rest and gather and feast with friends and family because the glad tidings of great joy are far more than that.

Have you ever waited for something for a long time? Have you waited for a new job? Have you waited for a spouse? Have you waited for a child? Perhaps you know that feeling of finally hearing the good news of its arrival. Or perhaps you are still waiting.

The angel’s message was centuries old, thousands of years old. People had been waiting for generations, passing on the hope to their children and grandchildren and going to their graves still clinging to the promise, still waiting. In a garden long ago, God promised a young brokenhearted couple that a descendant of theirs would one day reverse the curse of sin and death. And then began the wait: children were born and died, families and nations grew, and rose and fell. But the promise was repeated again and again, and often to the childless and barren, to those who knew what it was to wait and long.

The genealogies, the lists of names in the Bible, those are lists of the people that God remembered. They are lists of promises kept. Children born, a line of promise preserved. And so the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of that great promise, but it is also the great and final “yes” to all of God’s promises. The birth of Jesus is the sure word that all things will be put right, that death will be swallowed up forever, and no good thing will be lacking.

Do you hear that? Every longing heart, every disappointment, every regret will be answered in Jesus and in His Kingdom, in this life and in the life to come. We decorate because God has come in the flesh, and He is putting all things right. We celebrate and sing and feast because God has kept His promises and He will withhold no good thing from His people, in this life and in the life to come. He will personally fill every empty hand and every longing heart to overflowing.

Glad tidings of great joy indeed.

Toby Sumpter

DECEMBER 14 - Herod the Not so Great

IN 40BC the Roman Senate voted to make Herod the King of Jews. So, imagine his shock when kingly astrologers arrive in Jerusalem and declare that they are seeking a newly born king of the Jews, to worship this new king. Top it off with a star being aligned in honor of this new king. Herod didn't have a newly born son. If he had, he likely would have simply murdered his own son. He did that sort of thing.

Herod does not take well to these events. The heavens foretelling the end of his dynasty would not be what he had hoped to read in the galactic newspaper. Herod was of Edomite descent, and his ancestors had likely converted to Judaism at some point (cf. Obadiah). Edomites were Esau's descendants. The Jews, from all accounts, had mixed feelings for this king. He was more respectful of their religion, and he was better than Roman governors, but he wasn't a rightful heir to David's throne. He was an ally, perhaps, but not a friend.

Thus, all of Jerusalem is in turmoil when news of a newly born king of the Jews is announced by these Magi (Mt. 2:3). Herod schemes and conspires to defend his throne. He finds out where the promised king would likely be born (Bethlehem). He gives the Magi instructions to return to him with news of this "king" under the thinly veiled guise of wanting to worship this new king himself. Herod later massacres all the infant boys of Bethlehem, in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 31:5).

Herod's kingship was, to earthly rulers, lawful. But God is the one who does the seating arrangements for kings (Dan. 2:21). Like other wicked kings (think Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, etc.) we see that they are merely servants to *His* purpose. When He is done with them, He gives them their stage directions: exit stage left.

Thus, Herod evidenced to us that earth's kingdoms were less than enthused by news that a new king had come. Indeed, Christ's advent did not only have spiritual implications: our salvation from sin. It had implications for *everything*. In other words, Jesus came to be the lawful king of the *world* (Ps. 72:7). Herod, like Saul of old, sought to kill the King whom God had anointed (Christ means *anointed one*) over Israel. But in the end, it was Christ's government and peace which had no end. And even Herod's malice and death was used to fulfill the words of the Old Testament prophet (Mt. 2:15, 23, cf. Hos. 11:1, Isa. 11:1). All of this combined was a death-knell to the kingdom of man, informing the nations of this world that the Kingdom of God had come.

DECEMBER 15 - Prepare the Way of the Lord

BEFORE the coming of our Lord, God sent John the Baptist, to prepare His people for the great arrival of their Messiah. He was a forerunner, a herald whose cry of repentance was to prepare the Bride to meet her Bridegroom.

As it was written in the Book of Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord,

Make His paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

And every mountain and hill shall be made low,

And the crooked shall become straight,

And the rough places shall become level ways,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Isa. 40:3–5).

The way to get ready for the arrival of Christ, both at the first Christmas and now, is to remove every obstacle in the way of receiving Him. Every valley is to be lifted up and filled and every mountain flattened in order to make a level highway for the Lord’s coming.

Isaiah is of course not speaking of the literal landscape surrounding Jerusalem, but rather the metaphorical terrains of the hearts of those who shall see their King. In order to receive Him rightly, in order for His coming to be a joy and not a terror, hearts must be readied. Whatever is crooked must be put straight and the rough places sanded smooth.

So what are the obstacles in the way of the Lord in your own life right now? What sins are keeping you in the joyless dark? Advent is a time to take inventory, a time to repent, remembering the gospel and welcoming the light of Christ in your homes.

In all of your preparations of gift wrapping and cookie baking, do not neglect your own hearts and the hearts of your children. Humble yourselves before the Lord’s appearing. Anticipate His arrival. Tell the story again and again to your family, increasing their joy and wonder in Him. For the Lord is near, the Lord is coming, the darkness is fleeing and the light of Christ is dawning.

So lift up your heads and receive your King.

Shawn Paterson

DECEMBER 16 - Rachel Comforted

CHRISTMAS is the best. But it is the best beginning of any possible story because this story had the best middle and the best ending. Christmas is glorious because it made Good Friday and Easter possible, and they are the best. Good Friday and Easter made Ascension and Pentecost possible, and they are the best.

If any part of the story is taken out, then the whole story collapses. And if the story collapses—since that story is our gospel—then we are still hopeless, lost in our sins. Without Christmas, there is no Pentecost. Without Pentecost, there would be no point to Christmas. If this story collapses, then we collapse too.

God is the ultimate weaver of tales. But His tales are not wispy bits of imaginative whimsy. This world is not His sketchbook. This is His novel, and every detail in it hangs together. Not one scene is out of place, and not one character was badly written. Everything ties together, including those elements we do not yet understand.

Rachel could not be comforted because her little ones were no more. They had the great privilege to go out to battle, battle with the great serpent, before they were two years old. They lost their lives in that battle, but they gained all the spoils of the war. Rachel lost her boys, but in the resurrection, she will be comforted.

Before Jesus was revealed to the nations as Messiah the Prince, He certainly had disciples who proclaimed they would die for Him. But during the Lord's earthly sojourn, no one did die for Him—except a collection of nameless little boys. And in the resurrection, we will learn who they are, and find out their names, and their mothers will bless the manifold wisdom of God.

The day is coming when all will see the resolutions of the imperfections at the beginning in the blinding glory of the end.

Douglas Wilson

DECEMBER 17 - How to Despise the Shame

THERE is a holy or gracious shame that accompanies real sin. It is possible to feel shame for what someone else did or for something that seems embarrassing, but that is not what I'm talking about. Holy shame is like the pain of touching a hot stove—it tells you that something is wrong. When Adam and Eve sinned, they realized they were naked and became ashamed. This was a good thing because it was telling them they were not right with God. Holy shame ought to drive us to God to deal with our sin and cover our shame. But if God doesn't deal with our sin and cover our shame, we will be like Adam and Eve trying to get fig leaves to do something they were never intended for.

This is why Satan and the enemies of God seek to weaponize shame, trying to use shame to keep us quiet, to keep our heads down. Satan is the accuser, and so he accuses the brothers night and day with real sin and with lies. But for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation. On the Cross, Jesus took all our guilt, and this necessarily means that He also took all our shame. He took our lust and envy and bitterness and hatred and complaining spirits, and so He also necessarily took the shame we feel for them. Christ was put to shame in our place, so that we would never be put to shame in Him. He was stripped naked and crucified before jeering crowds, so that we might be covered in His royal robes of perfect obedience. And in so doing, Jesus has put Satan and every accuser to open shame, because their accusations are powerless when every actual sin has been answered by the blood of Christ. This is our glory.

And since this is our glory, do not be ashamed of any of it. Wave the cross. Boast in the cross. Celebrate this story. Share this story. Sing this story. Despise the shame. Christ our God has come for us. He was born in a stable, lived, died, and rose and has taken away all our shame and clothed us in a glory that can never be taken away.

Toby Sumpter

DECEMBER 18 - Look to the Needs of Others

ON THE one hand, you cannot blame the man who says that he is going to look out for himself. He has a busy life. A full plate. And only so many hours in the day. Moreover, the Bible does not forbid, but actually requires that a man look to his own needs so there is no problem there. The problem is taking the biblical truth that every man should shoulder his own load (Gal. 6:5) and falsely deducing from that standard that you only have to worry about your own pack. Philippians 2:4 says that we are not only to look to our own needs, but also the needs of others.

The command is not simply to meet the needs of others as they arise. The command is to pay attention to the needs of others. It is far too easy to develop tunnel vision, particularly when things get busy. I saw Jeff with that flat on the side of the road, I saw him in the snow without a car jack, but it was Black Friday and everything was 30% off. If we're honest, we don't need the hustle and bustle of the holidays. We can be inconsiderate of the people around us when the pace is normal.

Looking to the needs of others requires energy. It requires an enlarged heart. And God supplies both of these requirements in His Son. We have entered into the Advent season so we are reminded that Christ came. Christ paid attention. He saw our need. Even being equal with God, He took upon himself the form of a servant in order to deliver us from our trouble. Trust Him and look to the needs of others, knowing that from His fullness we receive grace upon grace.

Jared Longshore

DECEMBER 19 - How Are You Preparing?

THE four thousand years from Adam's fall to Christ's birth were full of God's preparations to redeem us. His eternal purpose was brought about by His sovereign care over all of history's details. His preparations all culminated in a small village. A child was born in something like a barn. This was the child who had been promised to Eve who would crush Satan's head. And God is still preparing; preparing a bride for the *second* advent of His Son.

In Proverbs, we're exhorted to cultivate the virtue of Preparation. It's found there in a number of guises: diligence, prudence, readiness, planning ahead, providence. The slothful man is pictured as hastily living for the moment, resulting in a shamble of an existence. The diligent man, by contrast, is rewarded with wealth and largesse.

A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished (Prov. 27:12).

The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want (Prov. 21:5).

Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war (Prov. 20:18).

During Christmastime we all busy ourselves with *preparation*. We prepare gifts, food, decorations. After all, the presents don't wrap themselves, the turkey won't cook itself, and the Christmas tree won't chop itself down to ornament itself. We arrange schedules for the Christmas meal and gussy up for the Christmas Eve service. This month is brimming over like your waistlines after a month of fudge, cheese, and eggnog with *preparations*.

This season should remind us of how we ought to go about our entire life. We're always preparing. We're either preparing like the wise son of Proverbs, or like the lazy fool. Either like a Scrooge, Grinch, Couch Potato; or a diligent man, imitating the providence of God. One day you will give an account for your life. Will you be ready for that reckoning?

DECEMBER 20 - Mary, Our Example

MANY years ago, the angel Gabriel visited a young virgin in the city of Nazareth. Her name was Mary, and she was betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.

After greeting Mary and comforting her, the angel presented her with a message from the Lord: “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Lk. 1:31–33).

Mary replied sincerely, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”

And Gabriel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:35).

And Mary, in all meekness and humility, responded to *the greatest mystery of our faith* saying: “Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! *Let it be to me according to your word*” (Lk. 1:38).

In this moment, we see Mary’s ready willingness to obey God—even in the face of many questions and concerns. While this moment was one of great honor for Mary, it also meant for her the loss of reputation, the complication of her betrothal, and a great trial for her faith. It was not an easy and light thing for her to say, “*Amen*, let it be.” But she asked no further questions of Gabriel, and she had no objections for God. Like Mary, we must also be willing to obey God’s revealed will every day. And not only must we be *willing* to do such things, we must actually *do them*.

Mary was the most honored woman in the world. All generations indeed call her blessed (Lk. 1:48). She was chosen by God to bear the Son, the Savior of the world. But we should never forget that the relationship of a believer to Christ is of much more significance than that of flesh and blood, of mother to child. For Jesus says, “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mk. 3:35). Yes, blessed is Mary and her womb that bore Jesus. And so also are all those who likewise hear the word of God and obey (Lk. 11:27–28).

Shawn Paterson

DECEMBER 21 - Christmas Extravagance

THE first Christmas was extravagant. God did not merely send angels and dreams and give barren women birth. He did not merely involve the stars and stir up the Roman Emperor to perform a census. He not only involved magi from the East, and shepherds in the fields, and governors and soldiers, on top of all of these things and many more, God Himself came. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And the extravagance caused a lot of complications, even trouble. Mary and Joseph had to travel down to Bethlehem at the end of her pregnancy, the shepherds left their flocks, the wise men traveled far, and Herod ordered the slaughter of children. Of course it's possible to make a big deal about Christmas and forget the central thing, but it's also possible to resent all the complications, to resent the trouble. It's possible to despise the extravagance. It's possible to be stingy, to have a bad attitude, to be bothered by all the parties, all the shopping, all the gifts, all the decorations, and all the difficulties. But it was the extravagance of God that saved us from our sins. And it has been His extravagance that has continued to save sinners down through the centuries. His extravagance answers our prayers, gives generously, and fills up our lives with good things. And perhaps most of all, His extravagance interrupts our plans. His goodness complicates our lives.

So the exhortation is to rejoice in the busyness, in the wrapping paper, in the gifts and parties and crumbs and mud tracked into the house. Rejoice in the late nights, in the last minute presents, in the early mornings, and even when the kids get sick or you aren't able to do what you had hoped to. And even the really hard things, like missing loved ones. It's the goodness of God that highlights the hard things. Rejoice because Immanuel has come. Rejoice and give thanks and embrace the extravagance. Christmas is not about you, it's not about your comfort, or having the perfect experience, the perfect house, or the perfect day: it's about Christ. He is Lord of Christmas, and He is Lord of your Christmas. So prepare Him room. Make room for His plans. Make room for His extravagance.

Toby Sumpter

DECEMBER 22 - A Little Holiday Insurrection

AS WE approach the celebration of Christmas, we need to remember that such celebrations are an essential part of the cultural glue that holds a people together. When that kind of thing is gone, it is all gone. Battles over nativity sets on county courthouse grounds are not a trifle.

But we have to take care not to hold on to the trappings tenaciously, while losing the heart of the celebration. To fight for the Christmas tree while losing Jesus is to be guilty of mindless folly. Jesus really is the reason for the season. To hang on to a winter festival, a burst of glory in the bleak mid-winter, while neglecting the reasons why this is such a powerful metaphor, is to surrender without technically surrendering.

We should want everything to be named in Christian terms. Our calendar does well with B.C. and A.D. and we should keep it that way. And we do not want the rhythms of our time within a year to be defined by Soviet-style civic holidays. Labor Day is fine for barbecue, but do we really want to mark our commitment to labor unions, and then not commemorate the birth of the Son of God?

If we want our laws to reflect biblical justice, and we do, and if we want our rulers to acknowledge the God of Heaven, and we do, then we as Christians need to live that way ourselves, and we need to live that way without getting permission from our secular rulers first. They are not in charge of that.

Of course, as we define our time in Christian ways, we have to recall and remember the errors we Christians fell into when we had it all our way. We should keep our celebrations modest and Christ-centered—on Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and gifts. There is no need for a festival dedicated to Our Lady of the Miraculous Tortilla.

But at the same time, remember to keep your priorities right. As we resist the idols of the age, we should start with the big ones—by which I mean secularism statism—and not the idols that were huge four centuries ago. Remember that in the right spirit “Merry Christmas” is a statement that promises insurrection.

Douglas Wilson

DECEMBER 23 - Getting Ready for the King

ADVENT means coming or arrival, and it is the beginning of the Christian calendar. Historically, Advent begins by celebrating the fact that Jesus will one day come to judge the living and the dead. This is why we sing *O Come O Come Emmanuel*. We are not in the first instance reenacting what it was like for Israel to wait for the Messiah to be born (though we certainly *remember* that). No, we are actually pleading with God to send the Messiah *again*.

Of course we cannot separate these two Advents. It is the first Advent, His birth in Bethlehem that gives us confidence to pray for His second Advent. While some Christians have been so infatuated with the second coming of Jesus they have essentially checked out of being useful and helpful in this world the Bible makes it clear that the coming of Christ as our judge is reason for tireless preparation. Stay awake. Work hard. Learn more. Make beautiful things. Lift up the needy.

So as you prepare for Christmas, think of all the decorations and food and gifts, as true signs and symbols of what your life is supposed to be constantly given to: preparing the world for the King. We are not pretending. That is exactly what we are doing every single day of our lives. To live for Christ is to live every single day getting everything ready for Him. We want our hearts ready for Him; we want our families ready for Him. We want our neighborhoods ready for Him; we want our cities and nations ready for Him. We want schools and hospitals and industrial plants and theaters and laboratories ready for Jesus.

This means that all our activities ought to be done for Him, in obedience to Him, in excellence for Him, and for His praise and glory. Christ has come, and Christ will come again. This is the good news of Advent. It is our hope, our joy, our glory, our driving purpose in life. Christ has come; Christ is coming again.

Toby Sumpter

***DECEMBER 24* - And so “Merry Christmas” It Is**

OUR most common phrase used to celebrate this time of year is “Merry Christmas.” This is good and right, but like everything else it can be ruined if we try it on autopilot.

This means that we are claiming that the characteristic keynote attitude surrounding this holiday is cheerfulness. And this is done, at least in the northern hemisphere, in the “bleak midwinter.” So it is not simply a cheerful holiday, full of merry-making, it is such a holiday that is juxtaposed against an incongruent background.

And that juxtaposition is part of the meaning of Christmas. This is a time of celebration, but it is a celebration over the birth of a Deliverer, a Messiah, someone who was sent to do something about the surrounding darkness and evil.

Christ was not born at the culmination of God’s deliverance, but rather at the initiation of it. Our salvation had begun in the Old Testament era in the sense that God promised it in multiple places. But it was not until Gabriel spoke the incredible words to Mary that the salvation started to take actual, physical shape. The fact that it was taking shape in the womb of a young woman, selected by divine grace to be the mother of the serpent slayer, means that God was intent on evoking a deliverance for the lost human race from within that lost human race.

Light was born in the darkness. A mass of unrighteousness was huddled on this planet, and out of our midst came a righteous one. How God contrived that is a matter of endless adoration. A Savior was conceived in the midst of the race that required saving. Purity rose up out of corruption, and drew millions of corrupted but now forgiven sinners after Him, including His own dear mother.

God had promised to do this ages before, but in the Incarnation He actively began the process of pulling the universe inside out. And so it is that we are privileged to say, “*Merry Christmas.*”

Douglas Wilson



MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM CHRIST CHURCH & KING'S CROSS CHURCH