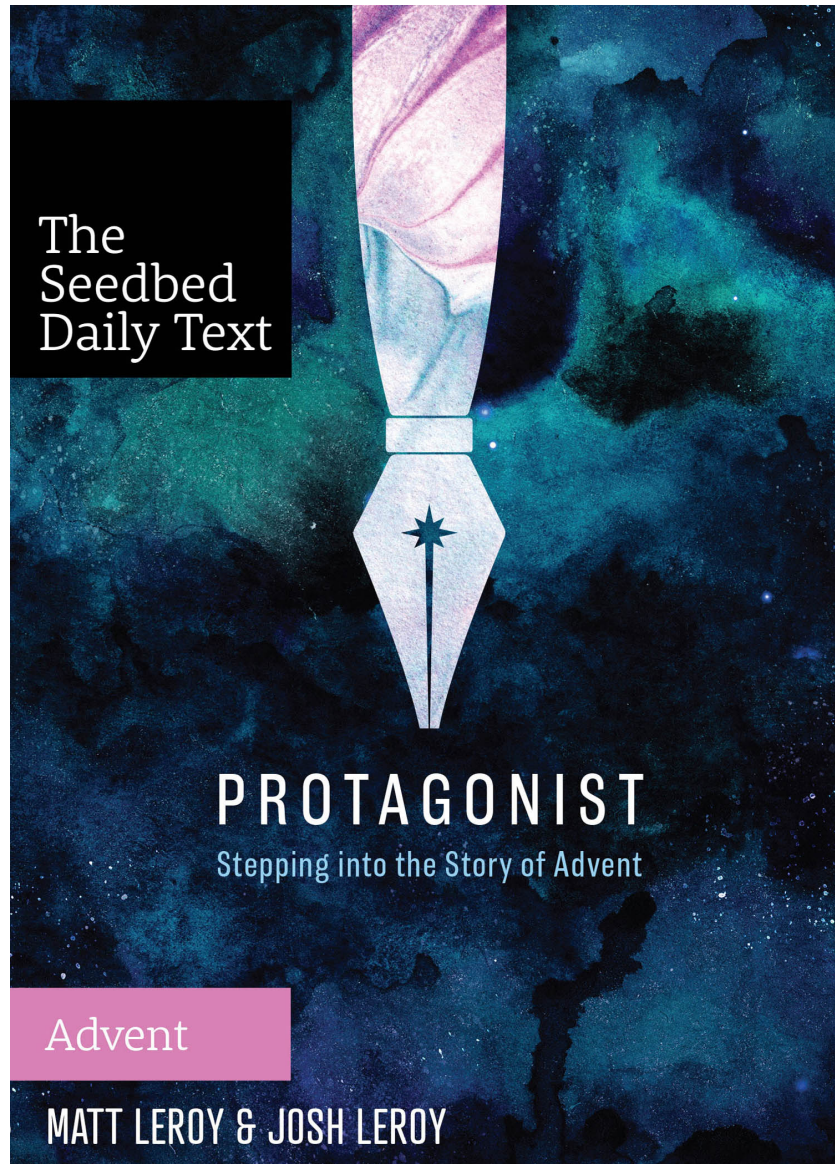


The Protagonist



An Advent Bible Study-
based upon *The Protagonist* by Matt and Josh Leroy

Week 1 - The Protagonist

Opening Thought:

Hamlet could never meet Shakespeare.

- C. S. Lewis

Protagonist = pro·tag·o·nist/noun: protagonist; plural noun: protagonists¹

1. the leading character or one of the major characters in a drama, movie, novel, or other fictional text.
2. an advocate or champion of a particular cause or idea.

So again, Hamlet could never meet Shakespeare... unless, of course, the author (Shakespeare) wrote himself into the story!

Scripture: John 1:1-5, 14-18 NLT

1 In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

2 He existed in the beginning with God.

3 God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.

5 The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

15 John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

16 From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. **17** For the law was given through Moses, but God's unending love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

¹ <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>

Mystery of the Incarnation:

The Creator steps into the story, and takes the lead role. The Author becomes the Protagonist. And the One who built the theater and crafted the script prepares to make His entrance. This is the miracle of Christmas and Advent seasons. Jesus becomes Immanuel (Emmanuel). Jesus is the Protagonist of the human story.

Immanuel ~ Emmanuel ~ God with us.

[Isaiah 7:14 NLT] All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him **Immanuel** (which means ‘God is with us’).

Advent ~ means to arrive, or arrival. [\[Read Introduction, pg. xi and xii\]](#)

In Kingdom Imagination ~ Advent tells an alternative story. It is a season of the Christian calendar where we intentionally enter into a time of waiting, longing even for the arrival of Jesus.

In Hebrew:

[יָחַל] (yaw-chal’) verb ~ wait; expectation, wait expectantly, to hope for...

In Latin:

spes ~ hope, expectation, expectance, expectancy, anticipation, apprehension

The root word for *wait* in both languages can also be translated as *hope*. And this is what we do in Advent, we **wait** with **hope** for the coming Christ.

The Dilemma:

Bound by our sin and locked in our fallen world with no way to break ourselves out, reconciliation with God was an impossible dream from the human perspective. We could never get to Him.

The Protagonist

Our only hope was that He come to us. And in the fullness of time (God's time, *Kairos* time) the plan (or plot) of God takes a scandalous turn, one that we dared not imagine.

Advent causes us to slow down for a minute, pause, and remember. Remember what? We must begin by remembering our sin, our need for rescue, and our desperate longing for a Savior!

The Plot Twist:

When we think of Advent, we often think of the prophet Isaiah and his many prophetic words about the coming Messiah. In the study, they refer to Isaiah as the prophet "laureate." Here are just a few more popular ones along with Isaiah 7:14 above:

Isaiah 9:2 NLT The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.

Isaiah 11:1-2 NLT Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot— yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. **2** And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah 40:1-2ff NLT "Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. **2** "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over for all her sins."...

But, here is a text, a prophetic word from Isaiah that you may not be familiar with...

Isaiah 64:1-4 NLT Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down! How the mountains would quake in your presence! **2** As fire causes wood to burn and water to boil, your coming would make the nations tremble. Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame! **3** When you came down long ago, you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations. And oh, how the mountains quaked! **4** For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him!

The word "burst" here can also be translated as "rend." As in, *Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.* To rend is to rip open, like a garment was

The Protagonist

rent open in mourning. Isaiah instead of the normal familiar tones of expectant hope gives us in these words as a poured out lament. He is effectively saying:

Lord, look at the chaos of the world, and grieve alongside us. But, then Lord, rip open the heavens and come down to set things right! Don't just share our pain, do something about it. We need a theophany! That is, an appearance, a sighting that we can get our senses around. We know You are working in the background, but we want to see it center stage! Take the lead role!

When we are frustrated with how things are going in this world we, like Isaiah, are looking for trembling mountains from God. We want to see fire reign down on injustice, we want cancer wiped out, etc...

We want undeniable glory! God goes with the scandal of an unmarried pregnant teenager! Wait, what? We want the ground to shake. He comes as a helpless baby. This is Advent.

Questions to think about:

1. Who is the lead character in your story?
2. How did Jesus make His entrance into your story?
3. Where do you need God to act in your life?

Closing Prayer: Jesus, center of every story, we wait for You. Light of the world, make us new creations. O God, rend the heavens and come down. **Amen.**

Week 2 - The Singer

Opening Thought:

God sings over you!
- Zephaniah 3:17

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14-17 NLT

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
15 For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment
and will disperse the armies of your enemy.
And the Lord himself, the King of Israel,
will live among you!
At last your troubles will be over,
and you will never again fear disaster.
16 On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be,
“Cheer up, Zion! Don’t be afraid!
17 For the Lord your God is living among you.
He is a mighty savior.
He will take delight in you with gladness.
With his love, he will calm all your fears.
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

Consider This:

This is yet another prophecy about the Messiah. Did you see it? Look at the beginning of verse 17 again. *For the Lord your God is living among you...* and *He is a mighty Savior...* Our response is to sing! Rejoice!

Is there any other time of year where singing is so prevalent? What other season is so tied to melody than this? What other event in human history has sparked so much music to be written? Both religious and secular...

What is your favorite Advent/Christmas song? [\[Share some of yours\]](#)

The Protagonist

I have never really thought of it this way, but Matt and Josh Leroy remind us that the first two chapters of Luke read like a hymnal of sorts. Open up Luke and let's take a look: [[Encourage all to open Bibles to Luke 1 and 2](#)]

Luke 1:46-55 makes up what is commonly called *Mary's Magnificat*. She is overjoyed with the news that Jesus is coming, and she has a huge part in His arrival. Her response is written in poetic form.

Luke 1:67-79 makes up Zechariah's prophecy about his son to be born, John the Baptist. Again, his response is in poetic form. It is a song of his heart!

Luke 2:13-14 gives us the angelic host singing praises to God for the arrival of His Messiah. Imagine the scene out in the shepherd's fields that night.

Luke 2:29-32 gives us a glimpse at the song of Simeon's heart when he first beholds baby Jesus. Written once again in poetic prose.

So why songs? They are not essential. They are not even very practical for the most part. There are far more practical, clear and efficient ways to convey a thought or message. Here are some thoughts on this question:²

- "Where words fail, music speaks." — **Hans Christian Andersen**

- "Music touches us emotionally, where words alone can't." — **Johnny Depp**

- "Music is the universal language of mankind." — **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

- "Music is an agreeable harmony for the honor of God and the permissible delights of the soul." — **Johann Sebastian Bach**

- "Music is the great uniter. An incredible force. Something that people who differ on everything and anything else can have in common." — **Sarah Dessen, *Just Listen***

² <https://parade.com/1239349/michelle-parkerton/music-quotes/>

The Protagonist

According to our authors, music is - “The overflow of the excess of the heart. They are a means of expressing the heart when mere words won’t do the trick.”³

Mary’s Magnificat came from the overflowing abundance of joy in her heart at the announcement of Jesus and her part in His story.

Zephaniah’s message - Our mighty warrior God is singing over us. What a thought! We are called to sing to Him out of the overflow of joy in our hearts for our salvation; but, **imagine a God so filled with love for us that He sings to us from the overflow of His joy in us.**

Speaking of Songs...

Joy to the World (Or, How to Write a Better Song):

One of the first and most memorable songs of this season is *Joy to the World* written by Isaac Watts in 1719. He originally wrote these lyrics about the 2nd coming of Christ. We have subsequently made it into a song about the 1st coming and very 1st Christmas. [\[Tell story of Isaac Watts\]](#)

Scripture: Philippians 2:6-11 NLT

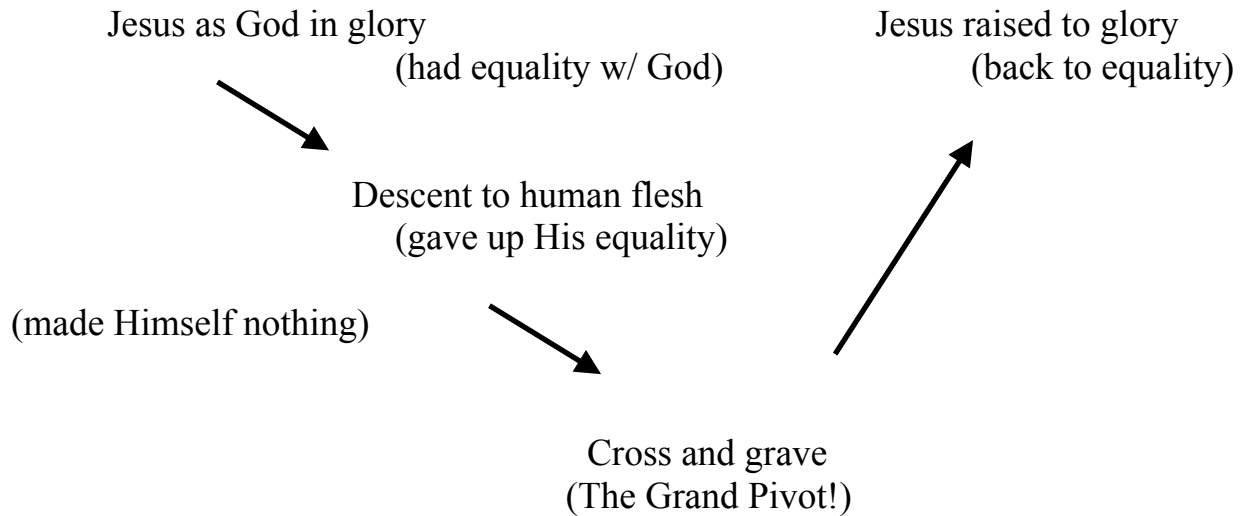
6 Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
8 he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal’s death on a cross.
9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

³ Leroy, Matt and Josh. *Protagonist*. Seedbed. 2019. pg. 19

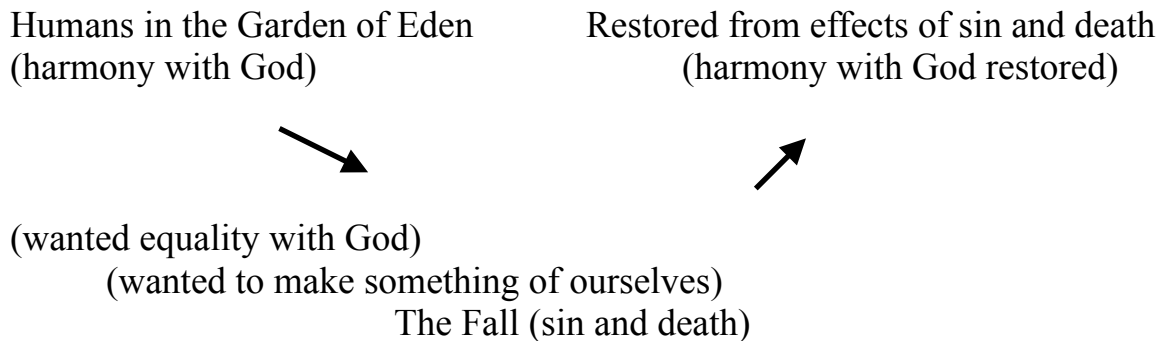
The Protagonist

This passage is believed by scholar's to be one of (if not thee) the first songs of the early Christian movement. As you can see it is written in poetic form just like the Magnificat and Zechariah's poems/songs.

Note the pattern of the song:



Reversal of humanity's story...



“While our sin follows a trajectory of fall and brokenness and death, His death pioneers resurrection and healing and life... In the garden, sin silenced the melody. In Advent, Jesus writes a better song.”⁴

Questions to think about:

1. What song captures the reality of where you are in life right now?

⁴ Ibid. pg. 25-26.

The Protagonist

2. What changes do you long to see in the world?
3. How can you embody that change and write a better song?

Closing Prayer:

Holy Spirit, sing the truth and strength and grace over us and teach us to live in step with your music, your song. Name above every name, we bow our knee and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

Week 3 - Clay Pots, Trumpets, and a Child Is Born

Opening Thought:

“A baby cries in the night and hell trembles at the sound.”⁵

- Matt and Josh Leroy

Scripture:

9:1 Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.

2 The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.

3 You will enlarge the nation of Israel,
and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.

4 For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

5 The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war
will all be burned.

They will be fuel for the fire.

6 For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His government and its peace
will never end.

⁵ Ibid. pg. 38.

The Protagonist

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

Consider This:

Look closely at this passage. It is one of the most famous Advent texts we use on a regular basis.

- We see the familiar thoughts of those who were walking in "great darkness" will see a light dawn upon them...

- We see the "child is born to us" that we are so accustomed to...

- We hear the names given to the Messiah - Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... and we rejoice...

- We know that some of these phrases have been forever memorialized in Handel's great *Messiah* work of art.

But friends, have we ever wondered about these verses in the middle that talk about Midian's defeat, shattered yoke's, warrior's boots and bloodied garments? That doesn't sound very Christmasy or Advent-like to me!

Digging Deeper: God's Strategy!

In verse 4, someone who is never ever associated with Christmas or Advent suddenly gets a shout out by Isaiah. That someone is Gideon even though his name is never mentioned. [In all fairness, Isaiah never had Christmas in mind when he wrote these words, he had the coming Messiah in mind only].

Isaiah says the coming of the Messiah, our rescuer, will be like another Gideon moment - "[the day of Midian's defeat](#)." So what does Isaiah mean by this?

Let's take a look at Judges 6 and 7. [[Encourage all to open to Judges 6,7](#)] Israel is being oppressed by their enemy the Midianites for 7 long years. They would come in and destroy all their crops and kill all their livestock. (vs. 6:1-6)

The Protagonist

So as the story goes, God chooses a most-unlikely candidate to lead the Hebrew people against their enemies, the Midianites. Gideon was a farmer, he was the youngest son of this father, and a member of the weakest clan of Manasseh. (vs. 6:15)

And of course, we all remember Gideon's request for a sign. The whole sheep skin and water thing... (vs. 6:33-40)

Anyway, Gideon finally concedes to God that he will lead the army against Midian. Then God directs him to cut the army down to only 300 men. What? (vs. 7:1-8).

Then God gave them the most unorthodox strategy to win the battle. He told them to stand on the hill above the camp of Midian. Each man had a trumpet, a clay pot and a torch.

At the appointed time in the middle of the night, Gideon gave the word and every man blew his trumpet, shouted "a sword for the Lord and for Gideon," broke his clay pot and simply stood fast. The Midianite camp dropped into chaos, men running around, shouting, trying to flee and they ended up killing each other while not one single Hebrew raised his weapon. (vs. 7:19-22).

So the Leroy's say - "Isaiah tells us that Advent is like that. The arrival of our rescue in Jesus is an echo of what God did for Israel through Gideon."⁶ Just as Gideon was shocked at the strategy of God for Midian's defeat; we too are shocked by how God saves us from sin and death.

Some of us may feel like we are the ones crushed by the warrior's boot. That it is our blood on the garments in this text. So we are happy to see them go up in flames by the coming of the Christ child.

Think about it: God used clay pots and torches with Gideon. We get a virgin singing a lullaby over a manger. Again - a baby cries in the night and hell trembles at the sound!

Yahweh Remembers:

The story of an elderly couple on verge of retirement! Yet God uses them.

⁶ Ibid. pg. 37.

The Protagonist

Scripture: Luke 1:5-17 NLT

5 When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. **6** Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. **7** They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

8 One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. **9** As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. **10** While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

11 While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. **12** Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. **13** But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. **14** You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, **15** for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. **16** And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. **17** He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

No Coincidence:

[Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2148] זְכַרְיָהּ = Zachariah, Zechariah Or Zkaryahuw {zek-ar-yaw'-hoo}; from zakar and Yahh; ~ Jah has remembered

Zechariah's name literally means *Yahweh remembers!*

Why is this important? Because Zechariah and Elizabeth had waited, and waited and waited. He was nearing the age for official retirement from the Priest corps, where he would become just a helper rather than a full time priest. Their story was marked by waiting and hoping. They wanted children, but had been unable to conceive for whatever reason. Elizabeth was heart broken that she could not bear a child for her husband. It would be her number 1 desire to do so.

The Protagonist

Have you been there? Have you wanted something so bad but God seems silent about it? How do you respond to God when He seems not to be responding to you?

Here is how Zechariah responds - Despite his disappointment, Zechariah is in the Temple working. He is praying to God once again. He has not let his disappointment turn into bitterness or despair. Instead, he is leaning into God all the more. Zechariah is engaged in the ultimate reality of worshipping God because he belongs to God.

Think about it - every time someone called Zechariah's name, every time he introduced himself, every time his wife spoke his name with love... Zechariah was reminded that *Yahweh remembers*.

Remember what we said last week - Advent is about waiting. Zechariah and Elizabeth would eventually become parents of John the Baptist. Their son would be the trailblazer leading up to Jesus the Messiah. "And the redemption of their pain is the beginning of our healing."⁷

Questions to think about:

1. What unconventional strategy is Jesus employing in your life right now?
2. What Gideon moment might you need?
3. What prayer remains unanswered in your life or what longing is yet unfulfilled?
4. How might the redemption of your pain be the beginning of someone else's healing?

Final Prayer:

God of angel armies, give us eyes to see You moving in ways we could never expect. God who hears and remembers, help us to trust that You hear and remember us specifically. **Amen.**

⁷ Ibid. pg. 44.

Week 4 - Look Again!

Opening Thought:

“Advent is an invitation to perceive. Christmas calls us to look again.”⁸

- Matt and Josh Leroy

Scripture: John 1:9-13 NLT

9 The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. **11** He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. **12** But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

Consider This:

[Read the Washington Post story about violin virtuoso Joshua Bell]

What's the moral of this story? In the routine of the every day, in the rush of the moment, how often do we fail to perceive the beauty around us?

Now consider the text once again.

10 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. **11** He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.

Even at the very beginning of His time on earth, the world did not find time or a place for Him...

[Luke 2:7 NLT] **7** She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

⁸ Ibid. pg. 49.

The Protagonist

What was going on that they missed His arrival?

[Luke 2:1-4 NLT] **2** At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. **2** (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. **4** And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

The city streets were busy with the census. The rooms were packed with travelers... There was no time for a new baby boy! There was no room for a new baby boy!

These facts, along with the reception Jesus received throughout His ministry, cause John the Gospel writer to give a harsh assessment that those who had been waiting for the Messiah missed Him completely (save a few faithful ones who recognized His arrival). John says - STOP! LOOK again.

Another Look: Perhaps it is time to take a fresh look at the story we have heard our entire lives! Here are the three texts...

[Matthew 1:18-24 NLT]

18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. **19** Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. **21** And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

23 "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'"

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

The Protagonist

Look closely at the text! Look closely at Joseph.

Why does the angel tell Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife (vs. 20)? The answer lies in the previous two verses...

Verse 18 says that while Mary and Joseph were engaged, they had not yet gone through the official wedding ceremony. And she was pregnant - which meant one of two things (in earthly terms):

1. Mary was unfaithful and had gotten pregnant from another man... which meant Mary could be stoned to death by Levitical Law (See Lev. 20:10, Deut. 17:5). This is partly why Joseph wanted to dismiss her quietly and also perhaps why she went to stay with her cousin Elizabeth in the first place...

OR...

2. Joseph had been a bad boy and engaged in sexual contact with Mary prior to their official marriage. Which would have heaped great shame upon him. So verse 24 says Joseph went ahead and married her. However, this most likely resulted in his reputation being trashed in their village, and perhaps their family as well. He loved Mary and he wanted to honor God's command.

He would teach the Creator of all the universe how to be a builder. The word used for Jesus's occupation in the Greek is *tekton*.

[Strong's Concordance #5045] **ΤÉΚΤΩΝ** = *tektón*: a craftsman, spec. a carpenter or stonemason, an architect. Part of Speech: Noun, Masculine

He would also show God what it means to be a man.

[Luke 1:26-38 NLT]

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, **27** to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. **28** Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

29 Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. **30** "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! **31** You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32** He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord

The Protagonist

God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. **33** And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

34 Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

35 The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. **36** What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. **37** For the word of God will never fail.”

38 Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

So let’s take a closer look at Mary as well. In Hebrew culture of the day, Mary would have started running the/a household at the age of about 12 (this is the age of adulthood in their culture). She would then be married sometime around 14, maybe 16 at the latest.

When Mary was greeted by the angel, she was confused and disturbed. Why? Because by all human measurements, Mary was a no one special from a backwoods village of little to no account.

[John 1:46] “**Nazareth!**” exclaimed Nathanael. “**Can anything good come from Nazareth?**”

Such was the reputation of Nazareth...

Why did Mary find favor with God? Was it her willingness to serve Him in this way? Was it her faithfulness on keeping the Law? Was she diligently seeking the coming Messiah?

And why would God purposely chose a situation that would bring such consternation and concern to a young woman such as Mary? Pregnant without having been officially married!

[Luke 2:5-7] **5** He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

The Protagonist

6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

So let's take a closer look at baby Jesus:

Born while his parents were traveling at the command of the Roman governor. There was no lodging available for his birth place, so he was born in the stable where animals were kept. (Quite possibly a cave near the town where baby lambs were birthed).

His first outfit was a bunch of rags wrapped around him to keep him warm and clean... His first cradle was actually an animal food trough made out of stone...



The Protagonist

This is our redemption! This is beauty arriving at an inconvenient time and in an unexpected setting as the masses rush by!

Advent and Christmas call us to look again. What will we see this year?

This is an invitation to perceive something more than Rudolph, Santa, and elves!

Questions to Think About:

1. Have you paused this year long enough to perceive this Advent season? What do you perceive?

2. How have you seen Jesus show up at inconvenient times and in unexpected places?

3. Where will you see Him today?

Final Prayer:

Light of the world, help us to see You and to see the world around us in light of You. Amen.

Week 5 - Revelation and the Ripple Effect

Opening Thought:

From a season of waiting and anticipation we now transition to a posture of beholding!

Scripture: Song of Solomon 2:10-13 NLT

10 My lover said to me,
“Rise up, my darling!
Come away with me, my fair one!
11 Look, the winter is past,
and the rains are over and gone.
12 The flowers are springing up,
the season of singing birds has come,
and the cooing of turtledoves fills the air.
13 The fig trees are forming young fruit,
and the fragrant grapevines are blossoming.
Rise up, my darling!
Come away with me, my fair one!”

Consider this:

Now here is a text no one expects to read during Advent/Christmas. But, we have entered into the season of *Christmastide*. This season runs from the day after Christmas until the day of *Epiphany*, which is January 6th according to our Western Christian calendar. It also makes up the *12 days of Christmas*.

Epiphany ~ “manifestation” = which is where the ineffable is made tangible.

For Christians, Epiphany is “not only when we see things from a fresh perspective, but also when we physically behold a reality that wasn’t there just a moment ago.”⁹

So we have come through the long (several weeks) waiting period of Advent, the birth of Jesus brought us Christmas, now we behold Him through

⁹ Ibid. pg. 74.

The Protagonist

Christmastide and Epiphany. The wait is over. (PS - still waiting on his 2nd coming!)

So what does the arrival of Jesus mean for us?

- None of our circumstances are structurally altered necessarily... yet all is permeated by a light (the Light of the World)...

- Our losses are not undone... yet they can be seen as instruments of redemption that have taken away our own pride and created space for compassion...

- Long nights of grief... are given a sense of meaning...

- Jesus does not necessarily give us all the answers.... but gives us a way to live in the face of uncertainty!

Look again at the text - [Look, the winter is past, and the rains are over and gone. The flowers are springing up, the season of singing birds has come, and the cooing of turtledoves fills the air. The fig trees are forming young fruit, and the fragrant grapevines are blossoming.](#)

So Jesus calls us to “[Rise up](#)” and come with Him. He declares I have entered the story with you...

Epiphany is not so much a season as it is a person, the person of Jesus. He is not the revealer, He is the *Revelation!* “In the lowliness of His birth, and in the radical submission of His ministry, Jesus makes manifest the character of God. He is the radiant, once-and-for-all reminder of God’s unswerving commitment to His creation, and He gives us hope enough to be holy.”¹⁰

Ripple Effect: Isaiah 11:5-9 NLT

[5 He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment.](#)

[6 In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat.](#)

¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 75.

The Protagonist

The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion,
and a little child will lead them all.

7 The cow will graze near the bear.

The cub and the calf will lie down together.

The lion will eat hay like a cow.

8 The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra.

Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm.

9 Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,

for as the waters fill the sea,

so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord.

So what is going on in this text and how does it relate to Christmastide?
First, let us provide the setting of when these words were first written.

The Hebrew people were in exile. Babylon had removed them from their homes, their cities, their place of worship and from their very lifestyle. Times were bleak to say the least.

Yet, along comes Isaiah with this vision of a return to the Garden of Eden. Here the people are lying in the burnt rubble of their lives and Isaiah speaks of a wonderful future.



The Protagonist

This is often referred to as a vision of the *Messianic Kingdom*, the earthly reign of the Messiah. All of nature is to be redeemed, and marked by universal wholeness.

“It is a future reality that we as Christians are currently longing for... at least in theory.”¹¹

The Messiah was born in the most humble of circumstances. We await His return; but, we must also remember that His birth is the guarantee of things to come! His birth is proof the story is real! The promise will be kept!



The Ripple Effect - when you drop a pebble into a pond the ripples work their way to the shore. For us dear friends, the pebble has already been dropped! The ripples arriving at the shore are inevitable!

The birth of Jesus was the pebble being dropped. The healing of the entire universe is now inevitable! Praise God!

Jesus has already done all that needs to be done! All that is required of us is to pray and obey! The restoration will thus be hastened...

¹¹ Ibid. pg. 77.

The Protagonist

His long awaited arrival has awakened within us an even deeper yearning for His return!

Questions to think about:

1. Can you hear the voice of the Beloved calling out to you in your darkness? What is He saying?
2. What do the lowly conditions of Jesus' birth reveal to you about His willingness to meet you where you are?
3. Look around you. Can you see any ripples? Any indication that the restoration is already underway?
4. How doe the birth of Jesus give you hope for today and not just for the distant future?

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for hearing the deepest cry of our hearts, and for responding by sending Jesus into our midst. Creator and Sustainer of all that is, renew within us a hunger for the completion of Your plan. Amen.