

ADVENT REFLECTION GUIDE

REDISCOVERING CHRISTMAS

— ✨ — BY AJ SHERRILL — ✨ —



— ✨ INTRODUCTION ✨ —

What is your favorite type of bread?

Why do you think Jesus used bread as a metaphor
to articulate his purpose?

PART 1: ADVENT THE GIFT OF WAITING

1. Before reading this, were you aware of the distinction between Advent and Christmas?
2. Did you grow up in a tradition that journeys through Advent?
3. What childhood memories of this season do you recall that impacted the way you see the Christmas story?

CHAPTER 1: MARY AND PRESENCE

- THE PRACTICE OF FILLING THE HEART

Guiding Theme: God's indwelling presence

Annunciation is defined as the “announcement” that Mary carries God’s presence through the means of grace.

1. In what way do you find the creation/new creation connection between Genesis 1 and Luke 1 compelling?
2. Do you ever consider Mary as the “ark of the New Covenant”?
3. Do you think of yourself as God’s dwelling place today, and how does that impact daily choices?

CHAPTER 2: JOSEPH AND CHARACTER

- THE PRACTICE OF RELATIONAL INTENTIONALITY

Guiding Theme: Openness to facing hard realities

Kiddushin is defined as part 1 of the betrothal process where a couple is considered married, but not yet consummated.

1. If the “buts” of life are the crossroads of transformation, what has been the most challenging “but” moment or season of your life?
2. How does viewing God as Father enhance or hinder your theological understanding?
3. How or toward whom is your heart tempted to harden?

CHAPTER 3: INNKEEPER AND HOSPITALITY

• THE PRACTICE OF RADICAL WELCOME

Guiding Theme: Radical hospitality was the most significant evangelistic strategy of the early church

Kataluma is defined as a guest room in a house; not an inn (as in a hotel room).

1. The innkeeper didn't exist in the way many were taught. What has been your understanding of this character in the story?
2. Who is the most welcoming person you know?
3. Is it possible to hold conviction and compassion at the same time? How?

CHAPTER 4: ZECHARIAH AND SILENCE

- THE PRACTICE OF STILLING THE MIND

Guiding Theme: Silence is a great teacher

Silence is defined as the intentional quieting of noise that God's whispering voice might become audible to the human heart.

1. Does silence and solitude come easy for you?
2. When has "grief" morphed into "gripe" in your life?
3. How can you create a rhythm for quiet during the busy Advent season?

CHAPTER 5: ELIZABETH AND SOLITUDE

- THE PRACTICE OF HEARING GOD

Guiding Theme: Solitude Can Lead To An Expansion of Reality Beyond Rationality

Solitude (*perikrybo*) is defined as the state of being alone and at peace with God and oneself. Loneliness, in contrast, is the state of being alone yet sensing deep inadequacy.

1. Do you find life clarity in crowds or in quiet? How would Jesus answer this?
2. Is our capacity to hear God increased by our willingness to silence noise?
3. How is your practice to hear the voice of God?

CHAPTER 6: JOHN THE BAPTIST AND WONDER

- THE PRACTICE OF BELIEVING ABSURDITY

Guiding Theme: Spirituality isn't opposed to mind, nor is it confined to human, rational categories as to what is possible.

Faith is defined as believing (trusting) in order to understand, rather than the other way around. In Latin the term is *credo ut intelligam*.

1. What faith leaps (beyond reason) have you made in life?
2. Maybe the Scriptures are deeper and wiser than we are. Do you believe this is true and how does that shape our understanding?
3. Who do you know that lives in great wonder?

CHAPTER 7: GABRIEL AND NOTICING

- THE PRACTICE OF WELCOMING ANGELS

Guiding Theme: Like oxygen that is invisible to the human eye, the world is saturated with God's presence beyond what we can imagine.

Enchanted is defined as filled with realities invisible.

1. Have you ever encountered an angelic presence? If so, describe your experience.
2. L'Engle wrote, "We lost our ability to see angels as we grow up." Is this true? Why or why not?
3. How does our openness (posture) to God avail or prevent us from encountering God?

PART 2: CHRISTMAS THE GIFT OF RECEIVING

1. What is your most meaningful Christmas memory? Why?
2. Have you ever experienced a disappointing Christmas? If so, explain why.
3. Were you raised in a culture where you moved on from Christ on December 26, or one where you allowed Christ to move in more fully?

CHAPTER 8: SHEPHERDS AND CHOSEN

- THE PRACTICE OF BEING FOUND

Guiding Theme: The God we aim to find is the God who finds us.

Chosen is defined as in our pursuit of finding God, we realized that God has been the one in pursuit to find us. Chosen means to be selected by God and to then be sent *for* God to reveal good news of joy to the world. The good shepherd has come for all the lost sheep.

1. Shepherds in the first century would not be expected nor welcomed in the story of the Messiah, but nevertheless they were the first invited. Who are the “shepherds” of our time who would perhaps not be expected or welcomed into the local church today?

**Guiding Theme: The God we aim to find is the
God who finds us (continued)**

2. How do you think Jesus arriving on earth in the lowest socio-economic bracket is good news?

3. The shepherds left their sheep to find the Messiah, who ironically had come to find them. When did you first recognize that God had found you amid your pursuit of looking to find Him?

CHAPTER 9: MAGI AND GENEROSITY

- THE PRACTICE OF SACRIFICIAL GIVING

Guiding Theme: The Magi recognized Jesus as the King of kings and fell in worship and generosity.

Worship (proskuneo) is defined as pouring one's life out before the Lord in adoration.

1. What is the difference between one who admires Jesus and one who adores him?
2. What is the most significance title you ascribe to Jesus, and what difference does believing that make in your life?
3. How expansive is your view of God's grace?

CHAPTER 10: HEROD AND DARKNESS

- THE PRACTICE OF INVITING LIGHT

Guiding Theme: Immanuel, the Light of the World, came into a world of darkness.

Goodness is defined as an interior state of character and integrity; distinct from greatness which is often ascribed to exterior achievement.

1. Why do you think Matthew included Herod as a prominent character in his telling of the Nativity story?
2. Do you think it a stretch to connect the conflict between Herod and Jesus to Esau and Jacob? Why or why not?
3. Where do you sense the worldly spirit of Herod most tempts you? (e.g. comparison, consumerism, cynicism)

CHAPTER 11: CAESAR AUGUSTUS AND AUTHORITY

- THE PRACTICE OF STEWARDING POWER

Guiding Theme: How the power we have determines whether we are under the influence of the Kingdom or the world.

Power (exousia) is defined as a capacity of resource that can be stewarded for good or exploitative for evil.

1. Caesar and Herod were two leaders who exploited their authority and believed themselves to be messianic to some degree. Who else historically do you believe thought him/herself to have messianic qualities? Why do you think this?

Guiding Theme: How the power we have determines whether we are under the influence of the Kingdom or the world (continued)

2. Why did you think Luke include Augustus in his gospel?

3. We can visit Augustus's mausoleum in Rome where supposedly his ashes dwell. Jesus's remains are nowhere to be found. How do you explain this?

CHAPTER 12: SIMEON AND EXPECTATION

- THE PRACTICE OF ACTIVE WAITING

Guiding Theme: Discerning the difference between *active* and *passive* waiting; why one transforms our lives while the other stunts our growth.

Active Waiting is defined as the time-related process of great expectation without losing focus and hope or seeking substitutes.

1. Do you imagine Jesus as a first-century, Jewish-religious man? Why or why not?
2. Where in your life are you currently having to wait for something to be fulfilled?
3. When in your life has active waiting “smoothed out edges” in your character?

CHAPTER 13: ANNA AND SCRIPTURE

- THE PRACTICE OF PROPHETIC IMAGINATION

Guiding Theme: Trusting that the story God is writing is toward fulfillment even when we cannot see or when life events do not go the way we think they should.

Prophet is defined as one who provides insights into things past, present, and future based on God's revelation. This gift is not an identity, but a spiritual fruit that is the extension of one's intimate relationship with God.

1. Who in your life hears from God?
2. Have you ever received divine insight into a situation? What was that like?

Guiding Theme: Trusting that the story God is writing is toward fulfillment even when we cannot see or when life events do not go the way we think they should (continued)

3. If liberation is about freedom from oppression, have you known Jesus as a liberator in your life? How so?



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