CELEBRATE Advent
Preparing Our Hearts for Jesus

By Pastor Keith Koteskey
Director of Church Relations, Bethel College
The sense of anticipation was palpable. I was maybe seven or eight years old and found myself constantly staring at the chrysalis. I had watched the caterpillar consume leaf after leaf, but when the day came that the caterpillar wrapped itself in a cocoon, the expectation level rose exponentially.

The world into which Jesus was born was marked by a similar sense of anticipation. The sense of expectation ignited by the prophecies of the coming Messiah was intense. Those promises regarding the One who would come had given the words “in that day” far greater sway than they might have held previously.

This season of Advent is a time to both remember the passion and anticipation that marked the time before the coming of the Messiah, and to rekindle our own sense of leaning into the future with an expectation for Christ to work in our lives now. People who know the Lord seem to always live in this state of expectancy, fueled by the awareness of a God who can do more than anything we could ask or imagine.

How might the prophecy about the coming Messiah have shaped the expectations of the people who lived in the days leading up to the birth of Jesus? What do these verses have to say about Jesus that shapes your anticipation of what He might do in your life?

---

**Sunday, Nov. 29 | Isaiah 11: 1-10**

Abram and Sarai found themselves between the future promise of God and the reality of circumstances, not unlike those in the days of Jesus’ birth or even those of us living now. One of the crucial elements that fueled their expectation was faith. How is your faith driving the anticipation of what Christ might do in your life in the weeks ahead?

**Notes**

This set of verses clearly reflects the element of God’s promise that lies behind so much of anticipation. Earlier the Lord had told Moses this land would be a wonderful and prosperous place, “flowing with milk and honey.” What role do the promises and the faithfulness of God serve in shaping your expectation of what He will do in your life? In your church? In your community? In your celebration of Christmas this year?

**Notes**

---

**Monday, Nov. 30 | Genesis 15: 1-6**

**Notes**

Bethel College invites you to embark on a journey through Old Testament prophesy and New Testament fulfillment as we prepare our hearts to receive Jesus on Christmas. This weekly devotional contains a scriptural focus and meditation for each day in the four weeks of Advent, starting on the first Sunday.
Try to imagine what it must have been like for the people of Israel marching around Jericho on the first day... and the second... and the third... How might this repetition and patience day after day have shaped the people's experience of God's work? What role does waiting on God to act play in your walk of faith?

Notice the different elements of anticipation at work in this brief story: Samuel's anticipation about going, the anticipation of “which son?” as they are each paraded before him, and the expectation that begins with the actual anointing of David. How did each shape Samuel's perspective? What elements of anticipation shape your experience of the Advent season?

Zechariah was surprised by his encounter with the angel in many ways — seeing the angel to begin with, hearing the startling words that promised a baby to one who had been barren, and listening to the extraordinary description of what this son would do. His lack of belief brought a season of silence to his life. What do you expect God to do in your life? What would be a major surprise for you?

Prayer Focus - Students
Pray for our traditional undergraduate, adult and graduate students as they finish up the semester. Pray that God would lead each one toward his or her calling. Pray also for prospective students as they consider coming to Bethel.
Sunday, Dec. 6 | Isaiah 9:1-3

The winds howled through the trees with gale-like intensity, or so it seemed. It was hard to tell as it was very dark. I was camping in the wilderness of northern Minnesota. Clouds had obscured what natural light might have come from the moon or stars. It truly was a “can’t-see-your-hand-in-front-of-your-face” kind of dark.

There’s something about darkness that magnifies fear, particularly when the darkness may also shroud a threat. I was eager for the wind to die down, but I was even more impatient for the night to end.

In time, behind the canopy of trees, the light of dawn slowly illuminated the world around me and my heart began to rest. The wind didn’t seem as violent. The forest seemed less dangerous. And a break in the clouds on the horizon signaled that sunshine would soon stream into what had been an unnerving world.

God chose light as a metaphor to describe the arrival of Jesus. The promise through the prophet Isaiah was that Jesus’ coming would be like that of a great light shining in a land that had been so dark. The light of dawn has a way of dispelling fear and igniting hope. Jesus would do all of this and more.

As you encounter light this Advent season — as the sun breaks forth at dawn or lights twinkle on your tree — pause to remember how the promise of light strengthened and intensified the expectation and hope for the people awaiting the arrival of the Son.

What “darkness” do you observe around you in these days? How does the coming and presence of Jesus bring an anticipation of hope — the light of dawn — on that darkness?

Monday, Dec. 7 | Isaiah 9:6-7

Just a few verses later the prophet speaks of the birth of a child — Jesus — whose work is described by several different titles. What do these phrases — Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace — reveal about who Jesus would be? How do they speak to the “darkness” in and around your life?

Tuesday, Dec. 8 | 1 John 1:5-7

In these verses, John draws a distinct contrast between walking in darkness and walking in the light. What is the difference? And what specific benefits does John describe for those who walk in the light? How might this description bolster your anticipation of what Christ might do in your life in the days ahead this Christmas season?
“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” - John 1:4-5

**Wednesday, Dec. 9 | John 1:1-5**

As John's gospel opens, we find a description of the coming of Jesus that invokes the metaphor of light. How does John describe Jesus as light, and especially the power of that light? What degree of confidence does this give you for how Jesus' presence in your life can bring power over darkness?

**Notes**

**Thursday, Dec. 10 | John 8:12**

In the gospel of John, Jesus is described as making a number of statements using the phrase “I am,” identifying Himself as divine, as one with the Father. In this verse He explicitly makes the connection to light. What promise does Jesus make here for those who follow Him? How are you experiencing that light He brings to your life?

**Notes**

**Friday, Dec. 11 | John 12:44-47**

In these verses Jesus draws a connection between Himself as the light and the belief of those who see the light. What hope do we have if our faith is in Christ? How might these words of Jesus be a source of encouragement and hope for you in this Christmas season? To what degree do you truly trust the light to dispel the darkness?

**Notes**

**Saturday, Dec. 12 | Matt. 4:12-17**

In describing the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, Matthew’s gospel invokes the verses from Isaiah to emphasize God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promises. Jesus was, indeed, bringing light to the land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali. In what ways does God's faithfulness in fulfilling this promise encourage your hope and anticipation of His promises yet to be fulfilled?

**Notes**

**Prayer Focus - Faculty/Staff**

Pray for our faculty and staff as they provide support for our students and influence their lives. Pray for our president, cabinet, and Board of Trustees as they make decisions that affect the future of Bethel College.

When I was a child, both sets of my grandparents lived a significant distance away. I often saw them only once or twice a year and it was a trip we always looked forward to. But it was also a trip that seemed to last forever. And the hours would seem to pass so slowly. I'm sure I was often guilty of being "that kid" who asks the question "How much longer?" over and over. And the closer we were to our destination, the slower the time seemed to pass. The sense of anticipation was powerful. I couldn't wait to arrive! I can remember craning my neck to catch that first glimpse of my grandparents' house as we rounded the curve near where they lived.

I have often wondered if the Magi who journeyed from the east had a similar sense of excitement. While most missed the arrival of the Christ child, they took notice. So significant was this event — so good, so important, so powerful — that they were driven to make the long journey to visit this one who was born king of the Jews.

Many people in our day miss so much of what God is doing around them. There are many reasons, but few are eagerly looking — craning their necks to see around the next curve — for what God might do next. Maybe it's time to rediscover that fervor! Perhaps this season of Advent might be a time when the Spirit rekindles that child-like enthusiasm and anticipation for you. In your own life, to what degree are you eagerly looking for what God might do? Where God might take you?

Notes

---

Monday, Dec. 14 | Matt. 2:3-6

Ironically, Herod, the reigning king of the Jews at the time, is surprised when the Magi from the east come in search of the "one who has been born king of the Jews." Does that strike you as odd? Why would he not have been expecting the arrival of the Messiah? What might have prevented him from anticipating this? What keeps you from eagerly looking for what Christ is doing around you?

Notes

---

Tuesday, Dec. 15 | Matt. 2:7-12

After an initial visit in Jerusalem, the Magi press on, for the journey is not yet finished. What is the response of the Magi when they see the star rise ahead of them? When they see the child? What might this teach us about the relationship between anticipation and joy? How might that impact your experience of this Advent season?

Notes

---

Luke tells us that after receiving the message of the angel, Mary took a journey to the hill country of Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. It would not be unusual for mothers-to-be to rejoice together. But this encounter seems unique and special. As you read these verses, what elements do you see that mark this encounter as truly extraordinary? How might this have heightened Mary’s sense of anticipation for the baby’s arrival? What things does God use in your life to heighten the expectation of what He is going to do?

Notes

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

Thursday, Dec. 17 | Luke 1:46-56

“...for [the Lord] has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.” Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s declaration recognizes that she is likely not the one most would have chosen for a significant moment in history. But she knows who God is and what that means. The Lord can use anyone. The potential lies in who God is, not in our capabilities. What keeps you from believing that God could do something truly extraordinary through you? How might Mary’s insight reshape your expectations this Advent season?

Notes

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

Friday, Dec. 18 | Luke 2:1-5

It’s probably a trip they weren’t very excited about taking. The timing was less than convenient, if not downright difficult, given how soon Mary was to give birth. But they were forced by Roman decree to make the trip. It certainly wasn’t what they had expected, and yet it led to a fulfillment of prophecy regarding the place where Jesus would be born. What does this teach us about how God works? About what God can do with apparent obstacles or shattered expectations?

Notes

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

Saturday, Dec. 19 | Luke 2:15-18

After such a dramatic birth announcement, the shepherds were certainly eager to make their trip into town to find this extraordinary child. In fact, their enthusiasm overcame any hesitancy they might have had given their perceived lower social status. What kind of response do the shepherds make when they arrive at their destination? What are those God-moments in your life about which you were so excited you just had to tell someone? Are you anticipating more?

Notes

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

Prayer Focus - Alumni

Pray for our 19,000 alumni who are making an impact in 49 states and 58 world regions in which they live and serve.
The costumed characters — shepherds, magi, villagers, and others — all had a consistent message. And you could read the enthusiastic anticipation on the faces of the children who were there.

Our church wanted to do a live nativity, but we wanted it to be an experience, not just a performance. So we asked ourselves, “What if the characters talked to the people who came?” And so emerged the live, interactive nativity experience that wound through a luminary-lit path on the church property. At points along the path, characters from the story talked and answered questions. But nearly all of them expressed excitement at the truly amazing event that lay at the end of the journey. With such grand promises, expectations were high!

The promises were about as amazing as they could be when it came to what Mary would experience in the days before Jesus was born. She would give birth — in itself a seemingly impossible thing. And then… her son would be the Son of God. But the angel had reminded her that with God, nothing is impossible. Imagine the sense of excitement such words ignited in her heart!

Her question and her response reveal both the surprising nature of the promises and a heart that actually believed it would happen. What kind of expectations do you have of God? Is the impossible — or perhaps better said, the seemingly impossible — a part of that? Is your life marked by similar expectation?

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” - Matthew 1:21

Joseph has his own experience of the extraordinary nature of this upcoming birth. Take a moment to consider the startling news Joseph is absorbing — his betrothed is expecting, the angel tells him this is the work of the Holy Spirit, and this son will “save His people from their sins.” What emotions might Joseph have felt? What questions might he have had? Do you seek to limit God to working in “usual” ways? Might there be a challenge for you this Advent season to be open to what God might do in unexpected ways?

Notes

This verse reveals the significance of the message that Joseph received. The words of the angel and the events about to unfold are fulfillments of prophecy. And even more amazing was the name given the baby here — Immanuel, or “God with us.” In a cultural time in which the separation of God and humanity was so emphasized (no human being entering the Most Holy Place in the Temple, and all others related to God through an intermediary, the priest), this was earth shattering. Why does this matter to you? What benefit do you experience from the fact that God is “with us” in the person of Jesus?

Notes

Notes

Notes
“‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’

The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.’” - Luke 1:34-37

---

**Wednesday, Dec. 23 | Matt. 2:4-6**

The announcement to King Herod is more about place than it is purpose. He wants to know where. The chief priests and teachers of the law consult the words of the book of Micah to find out. And the prophet doesn’t just say where, but why and in what way. How is the mission of Jesus described in the words the scribes share? Why does this sound like bad news to King Herod? In what ways does your expectation of Jesus involve His rule in your life? What challenge do you find in that?

**Notes**

---

**Thursday, Dec. 24 | Luke 2:8-14**

It must have been an amazing sight! The brightness in the night sky — enough to leave the shepherds terrified — and then a “great company of the heavenly host.” It was an announcement to fit the significance of the event. But take a few minutes today to think about what the angelic announcement specifically said about Jesus. What words and titles are used to describe Jesus? What promises — both explicit and implicit — are made? And what difference does this make to you?

**Notes**

---

**Friday, Dec. 25 | Luke 2:1-20**

Take a few minutes just to read through the story of Jesus’ birth and let it speak to your heart. Then consider this: How were the expectations of characters in the story challenged, fulfilled and stretched by what God did in Christ? Mary and Joseph were poor and likely perceived as unimportant and not very influential by others, yet their expectations were shaped by a deep trust in God. The shepherds — an outcast bunch in that day — received the glorious angelic announcement, because many other folks weren’t expecting God to act. King Herod expected (and rightly so) that a new king would pose a threat to his authority, but the Magi came from afar to worship such a king. What could/might the King do in your life or through your life to show Himself “with you” this Christmas? Or is there the risk you might miss it?

**Notes**

---

**Prayer Focus - Our Friends/Community**

Pray for those living in our region to be impacted by the presence of Bethel College. Pray for blessings over the friends of the college who provide support for our students and our endeavors.