



If you are interested in additional devotional material as you start the New Year?

Go to www.debbiegoodwin.net and click on [Devotional Guides](#).

If you have comments or questions, please write me at debmgoodwin@gmail.com

 *May you enjoy
the beauty of creation, 
The joy of the angels, 
♥ *The love of family,
And the peace of Jesus 
 *So that Heaven and nature 
will sing you 
All the way to the manger***



Again and again!

--Debbie

Let Heaven and Nature Sing



An Advent Resource
by Debbie Goodwin
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As you Begin . . .

Heaven cries. Nature groans. Either we can't hear it or we ignore it. Has it always been that way? Not from the beginning.

God created Heaven and earth, planted it, engineered intricacy and interrelatedness, and added people to populate and protect what He created. When there is balance between God and man, earth and Heaven; there is harmony. It is the best song on earth!

But when we are out of sync with God's plan, when we go rogue and work for our own advancement, the push for more and more and more; the music suffers. The earth groans. People fight. There is no harmony, just noise.

Scripture is filled with references of God's great creative work. Often scripture connects Heaven and nature as if they are a mighty chorus trying to sing us a wake-up call to understand what we've lost and how God wants to reinstate His harmony.

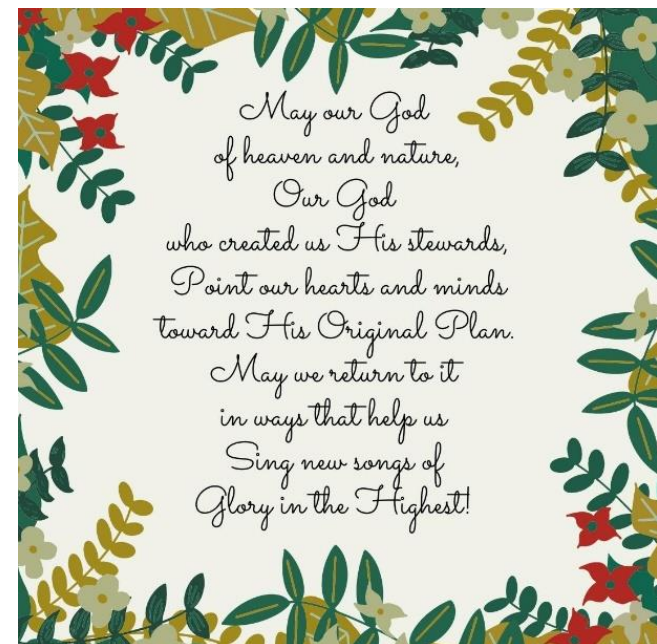
The Great Event that brought us Jesus was God's plan to save us from ourselves and our bent to destruction camouflaged as self-centered innovation, secular unity, and entitlement. Jesus came in the flesh because we stopped listening to prophets. We treated signs and warnings as a mere slap on the hand. We misused resources. We killed the dream God had for this world.

Advent is the best time to listen again to the music God created from the beginning of the world. It is the right time to stir up the possibility that Heaven and nature will sing a new song that will

stir our hearts to confession, repentance, and heart-new discipleship.

That's the focus of our Advent journey this year. Use this four-week daily devotional, *Let Heaven and Nature Sing*, to help rediscover the music God created in this world and through Jesus. If we start with decorations, we will have a holiday without a holy-day. Instead, we start in our hearts. We pray for our hearts to be cleared of anything that keeps us from hearing God's music. We pray that He will tune our hearts to sing His song, not ours.

Here is my blessing for all of us as we begin this four-week review of God's masterplan for the world.



First Sunday of Advent

Just Listen!

The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. Psalm 19:1-3, NIV

Creation is God's megaphone. It is the first language God chose to bring the world together. The language of creation crosses all other languages, cultures, and time divides. The challenge is to hear what God wants us to hear through His world.

His world sings to their Maker. Every birdsong of the morning to insect chatter at night, every crash of a wave to wind-rustled leaves -- every created thing is supposed to use their language to acknowledge Who God is and what He has done.

Creation is our teacher, but we are slow learners. Too often we use our speech in ways that build ourselves up and tear others down.

Creation is our teacher, but we are slow learners.

If we want to hear Heaven and nature sing, we need to listen in ways that take us to our Creator. We don't worship nature. Nature prompts us to worship God.

Use this first Sunday of Advent to Heaven and nature sing about creation and salvation! Worship is our choir practice! Don't miss it.

We don't worship nature. Nature prompts us to worship God.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Take a listening walk by yourself or with your family. Think or talk about how you hear creation "singing" to God. How is it a Christmas song?
- Bring creation into your home with pinecones, acorns, holly branches. Let their uniqueness remind you of your "song" because of you are God's creation, too



Week 1: Monday

Glory Rising

You have set your glory above the heavens. Psalm 8:1, NIV

As we begin Advent, we are starved for glory and yet it is all around us. Why do we limp through our days, heads down with attention to tasks while God's glory hovers nearby?

Every morning a sunrise brings its original art on the biggest canvas of the world. Every evening, another original work re-colors the sky before melting into dusk and darkness.

We need this glory boost. We need this reminder that God never runs out of creativity. That He can always bring new into our ordinary days. That nothing He touches is ordinary or dull.

Every day glory rises.

Glory rises and so should we. We need to rise to this day of possibility. Rise to the hope of what our God can do today. Don't let Heaven and nature sing without you, especially as we prepare for Christmas.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer

- Make a date with God to see His sunrise or sunset.
- Have a sunset break with your family.
- What is the hardest or dullest part of your day? What "glory" could God add to it?

Week 1: Tuesday

Lords a Leaping!

*My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks
to him in song. Psalm 28:7b, NIV*

Have you ever seen the "12 Days of Christmas" song acted out? Nothing is more hilarious than ten men in medieval tights trying to leap like a Baryshnikov prodigy. Unfortunately, it puts the emphasis on the leaping lords when it originally was supposed to remind children about the Ten Commandments.

It is so like us to give attention to the wrong things, especially at Christmas. While there is nothing wrong with decorations and gift-giving, it is easy to let these things take over our time and energy and lose the essence of joy for God's great gift.

God used cell structure and a heartbeat to send us Jesus. The God we have never seen became the visible Jesus. He was Heaven on earth. He was Creator come to live like the ones He created. This message gives us plenty of reasons to leap for joy. Let's focus on the reason for the season and not get side-tracked.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Which do you think God enjoys giving you energy for: stress or joy?
- Eliminate, reduce, or delegate whatever does not help you join Heaven and nature to celebrate with joy.

Week 1: Wednesday

Advent Light

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Gen. 1: 2-3, NLT

Dark places scare me. Dark hides what I fear *might* be waiting to harm me.

Like the time when my sister and I watched the late movie on Friday nights after our parents went to bed. Half-way through the movie it was ice cream time. However, to get the ice cream we had to go down the dim basement steps and through the dark garage to the other side where the chest freezer sat. Neither of us wanted to be the one to conquer our fear and get the ice cream so it always included the back and forth—

"You go!"

"No, you go!"

"No, you!"

Eventually, one of us wanted the ice cream more than we wanted the argument.

There was darkness at the beginning of creation, too. But it was a different darkness. It was darkness without evil. It was darkness

waiting to be formed. God *hovered* over this darkness. Then, in one burst of creative power, God introduced light so that darkness could no longer rule.

It is a good reminder that where there is darkness, God hovers. Hovering is His specific attention to the darkness and what it produces. It is His waiting for the right time to bring His light.

Where there is darkness, God hovers

Light was God's first gift to creation. Light gave definition. Light developed vision. God never wanted to hide creation in the dark because a world without light would have no song and no beauty.

It is easy to see the darkness in our world today. Is it as easy to understand God's hovering? To treat His hovering as disinterest does not represent the heart of faith. Instead, we use this Advent time of waiting to connect us to His hovering. The darkness will not win because in God's story, He always brings Light.

*The darkness will not win because in God's story,
He always bring Light.*

That's the story we celebrate in this season. It's the story of a re-start of our world turned inward. It's the story of how God spoke

His good Word again. This time the Word had skin and a heartbeat. This Word brought Light. However, this Light came to reveal what was inside our hearts.

We need this Jesus-Light to reveal the why of every action and attitude we try to hide or ignore. This Light doesn't shame or lecture or reprimand. This Light loves so deeply that there is no difference between God's Love and His Light.

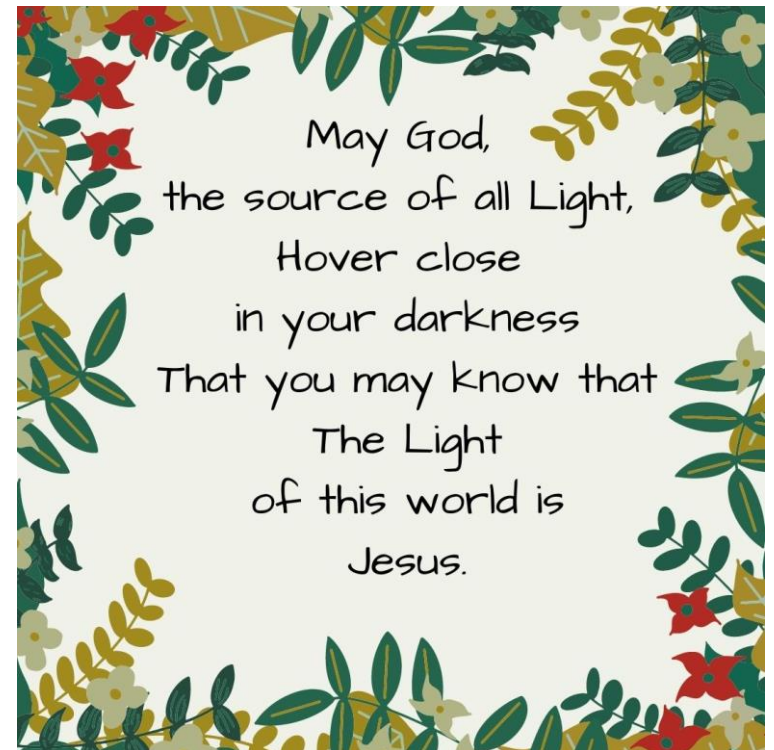
When we let Jesus be our Light, our Truth, our Way; we join Heaven's joy and creation's harmony. We not only *let* Heaven and nature sing; we join the choir!

*When we let Jesus be our Light, our Truth, our Way; we join
Heaven's joy and creation's harmony.*

Where could this Light take us on our darkest days? Where could this Truth protect us from going the wrong way? The message of Advent is that even while God is hovering over the darkness in our world today, He has already shared enough Light so that we can live without letting the darkness take us hostage.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Where do you sense God's hovering today? How does that change how you view any dark place you experience?
- Where do you need to share Advent Light with someone you know who is experiencing darkness?



Week 1: Thursday

You are MY Light!

*You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light.
2 Samuel 22:29, NIV*

Destructive forces are at work in our world. Hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, floods, death, disease, and the pandemic. Each situation lets in a little more darkness.

At Christmas we celebrate light for good reason. We need more light. The warm, colorful lights we use to decorate our homes wash a dark room with something soft and comforting.

The same is true when we let Jesus bring his Light to any place of darkness we experience. He becomes our lamp when something tries to scare us or confuse us. Jesus knows that if He can turn on light in our hearts, we will know our next step.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Where do you need to recognize Jesus' Light in some place of darkness, confusion, or fear?
- How does Jesus' Light help you sing the join the song that Heaven and nature sing?

Week 1: Friday

Everyday Light

*His is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning,
like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.
2 Samuel 23:4, NIV*

Sunrise is God's everyday Advent reminder that Jesus came to bring us Light. Every day, light pushes the dark away. He came to push our darkness away, too.

Consider a sunrise. Light begins a slow melting of the dark. A gentle creep. A soft wash. And there it is. The light of a new day.

That's what Jesus wants to do for us every day--push darkness away. He wants to wake us to *his* Light, *his* priorities, and *his* direction. We should never take it for granted. Even cloudy days share light that the night never gives. No matter where we see or experience darkness, wait for the sun to rise again and live the everyday Light God sent us in Jesus.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Watch a sunrise or sunset. Compare it to the way Jesus came into our world, slowly, quietly; but with a presence that could not be ignored.
- In the same way you depend on a light switch to bring light into a dark room, depend on Jesus to do the same in your heart and mind.

Week 1: Saturday

Get Ready for a Wedding!

In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion. Psalm 19:4, NIV

Did you know that every Sunday is like a wedding? People gather to celebrate the bridegroom who came into our world. Think about Heaven preparing to send the bridegroom to us. What excitement there must have been. What joy!

Each Sunday, we should anticipate that glorious moment when the bridegroom stands at the front of where we gather, waiting to receive us as his bride. Our whole attention should be on the bridegroom.

Advent should only intensify the reasons we gather to worship. We are not just spectators. We are the bride Jesus came to rescue and love so deeply we would not miss celebrating it over and over *together* in worship.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- What do you need to change by attitude or practice that will help you come to worship the same way a bride comes to a wedding?
- How can you help your family do the same?

Week 2: Sunday

An Invitation You *Shouldn't* Refuse

*Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Psalm 95:1, NIV*

One thing I missed more than anything else during the closed down life of the first part of the pandemic was not singing together on Sunday. I have no voice worth hearing. I need the cover of many voices. My heart needs that gathered sound. Singing by myself isn't the same.

The Psalms share many invitations to sing our love and praise to God. At Christmas we turn to the songs that review the story of how Jesus came. Sunday worship is our chance to put our voices together and do what the angels did that first Christmas: sing. Do what you can to make sure you don't miss this opportunity to join Heaven and nature and sing all together in one place!

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Today when you sing together in church, consider how you join Heaven and nature in the way they have been singing since the beginning of the world.
- Focus on the words and phrases about Heaven and nature's song. Let worship help you make your single voice stronger as you go into your week.

Week 2: Monday

Think About It!

When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him? Psalm 8:3, NIV

It was no accident that God created the Heavens and earth before He created us. God wanted to give us His beauty in a way that would always remind us of Who He is and what He brings to our world. But humanity became self-absorbed with activities that used creation for their own pleasures and advancement. People stopped considering the beauty and creativity of God as a reminder of God's reaching and satisfying love.

So God sent Himself as Jesus. Jesus, who was present when the world was created and loved the intricate balance between Heaven and nature. Jesus came to show us our place in God's mindfulness. Has it worked? Not enough. God took extreme measures to show us His extravagant love because God has always been mindful of us. Advent is a good time to be mindful of God and His reach for us.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Take a walk outside or spend 5 minutes looking out a window. Name what God created for you.
- Think about God's mindfulness of you this day. How are you giving Him your attention in return?

Week 2: Tuesday

No Separation!

No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. Romans 8:38, NLT

Creation has a powerful connection to Jesus. Jesus wasn't just standing beside God watching His creative acts. Jesus *was* God who separated the land from water, sent birds flying, and blushed earth with color. Jesus walked the earth of *his* creation, making mud for eyes to see, eating the fruit he designed, and teaching about seeds and planting.

When God poured himself into human skin and sent us Jesus, He wanted us to know that nothing can separate us from the reach of God except ourselves. We can enjoy harmony with Heaven and nature that only comes through confession and repentance because Jesus is our connection.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- How does your confession of faith help you find the harmony God intended between Heaven and earth, God and man?
- Where have you brought creation's color, texture, and fragrance into your home this Christmas? Treat them as pointers to the love of God as revealed in Jesus.

Week 2: Wednesday

Our Visible God

*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.
He existed before anything was created
and is supreme over all creation. Colossians 1:15, NIV*

How many photo albums do you have? How many boxes of unsorted pictures? Why do you keep them? For the same reasons I keep mine--they remind me of people I love and those who love me. Pictures bring me near those I love when I can't be with them in person.

God did the same thing when He sent Jesus. He took a picture of Himself and sent it to us as Jesus. God is Jesus in a manger. God is Jesus touching lepers. God is Jesus playing with children and blessing them. See Jesus walking on water? Don't you think the God who separated water from dry land could accomplish a buoyancy that only its Creator could. See Jesus and the woman accused of adultery? See how Jesus understood how much she needed compassion and forgiveness more than shame and punishment? That's God at His best!

But the picture we don't pull out of this album enough at Christmas is not an easy one to look at. It is Jesus on the cross. It is Jesus feeling the splinters against his back from a tree he created. It is Jesus losing blood and breath and life. This picture is God

reaching for us. This is God *becoming* love in the most tangible way possible. At Christmas we sing about how simple shepherds visited *God* and eastern magi discovered *God!* These are pictures we need because they remind us that no one is outside of the reach of God's love.

Anything that makes us believe God is far off, distant, or uninvolved is a desecration of everything God came to say at Christmas.

Jesus is God made visible. Jesus is God come close. Jesus is God for us! How are we using the pictures God sent us in Jesus? While we review every part of the Christmas story this season, let us remember it was God in the manger crying as baby and let us hear those cries for us. They are cries for the way our world is coming apart. They are cries for everything that continues to separate people from the love God inseparably shared with us in Jesus.

Read the Gospels as God's picture album. See God on earth. Live the wonderful mystery that Jesus is God made visible and never stop looking at this picture of all love.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer

- Read a Gospel story about Jesus. Insert God's name for Jesus. Picture in a new way how God came to earth.
- Find something in creation to think about for a few days. Consider its construction, purpose, rhythms, etc. Recognize how creation brings God close.

Week 2: Thursday

Compassion Unlimited

The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation. Psalm 145:9, NLT

Jesus is God's compassion showered on us. Jesus reminds us that God sees our great need and always sends His best answer, not just a quick fix. Advent involves both waiting for and receiving the compassion Jesus wants to bring us this season. We thought we needed it last Christmas. Here we are still so very needy.

Where do you hurt, fear, question, or feel unprepared? Jesus has come with all the compassion God sent him to share. Remember the pictures? He cried over Jerusalem. He wept at Lazarus' tomb. He empathized with lepers. He never turned a person away who had a question, a need, or a child. Jesus shows us God at work on earth. Don't miss your generous portion of compassion today.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- The more you receive God's compassion, the more compassion you can share. Don't start any day empty.
- Look for new ways to express compassion to those closest to you by affirmation, kindness, a smile, or a listening ear.

Week 2: Friday

Accountability

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable. Hebrews 4:13, NLT

From the beginning of creation, the world existed as an object lesson for us. No flower hides its bloom or its disease. No tree masks its weakness. No animal tries to be what it is not. We are the only part of creation that play games with God.

Advent reminds us that Jesus came to change that. He came to expose what we try to hide with excuses, rationalizations, and acting like we don't know better. We want the oneness with God until it exposes us. We want God to meet our needs and leave our motives alone. However, Jesus came to call us to a new level of accountability. Accountability to God is where we begin to grow. Without this accountability, we stay stuck in wrong motives and listening to inaccurate voices, including our own.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Where do you see something in creation starkly exposed? Pray that you learn to be just as exposed before God.
- Make God your accountability partner for your words, motives, and actions. Check in daily with God as your Growth Counselor.

Week 2: Saturday

An Advent Cry

Part your heavens, O Lord, and come down . . . Reach down your hand from on high; deliver me. Psalm 145:5, NIV

The world was in a dark place when God parted the Heavens and sent Jesus to deliver us. Has much changed? The world is still dark. If we could create a lighted map of the world to show every place where Jesus lives in the hearts of people, would there be enough light to help people see what God has done and is doing?

We can't *fix* the world, but we can demonstrate the difference God's deliverance through Jesus has made in our lives. We *can* show up with hope in God in the middle of everything that is changing. We *can* live our deliverance with passion and deliberateness. We *can* make a difference in our daily encounters. We *can* pray more Advent cries and look with confidence for the ways God will answer again and again. We can. Will we?

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Write your Advent prayer for the world. Then one for your family. Which shares more opportunities for God to use you to bring His deliverance?
- When you hear of a weather-related crisis, think of it as the shuddering of the world and join in as an Advent cry for deliverance.

Week 3: Sunday

Parting Skies and Hallelujahs!

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the Hs were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling him. Matthew 3:16-17, NLT

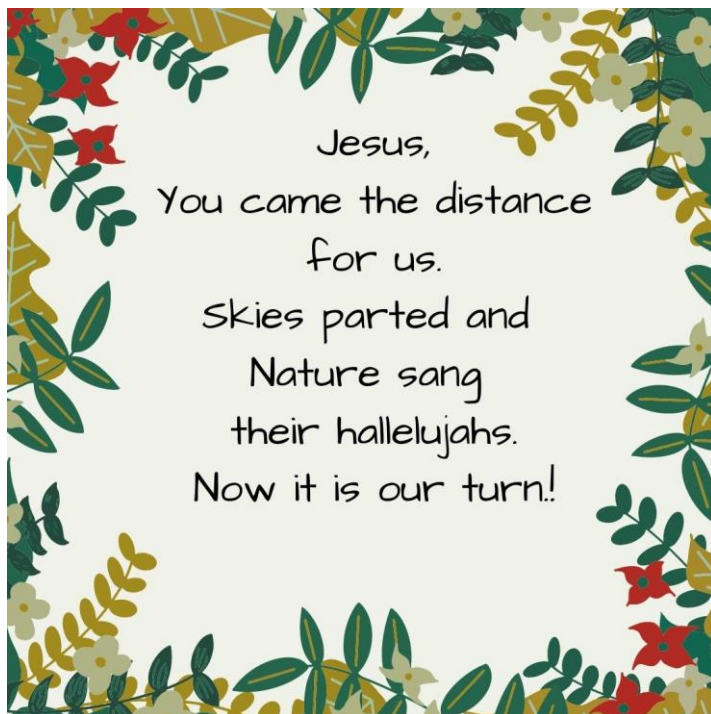
Heaven and nature were all harmony the day Jesus walked into the water to be baptized by his cousin, John. Was this gathering of clouds pulled back so all Heaven could witness this momentous occurrence? This startling mix between who Jesus was in the kingdom of Heaven and who he was on earth was so miraculous all Heaven had to see it for themselves. Although we don't usually think about Jesus' baptism during Advent, perhaps we need to take a special look at it through Advent eyes.

What parted the Heavens, should make us tremble as well. We often despair that Heaven is too far away from what earth has become. We point to crime statistics, divorce rates, and disease to prove it. However, Advent truth reminds us how Jesus immersed himself in the limitations of humanity. He stepped into the water he separated from the beginning of creation with a hallelujah yes to what it would cost to bring us to Heaven.

While every Sunday of worship is a hallelujah Sunday, each Advent Sunday intensifies our need to new empowerment for our journey to Heaven. As we gather for worship today, see how Jesus waits to point the way just like he did on the banks of the river Jordan.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Does your baptism remind you of the way Jesus opened Heaven for you? Sing it and pray it with hallelujahs in your heart!
- Have you shared your baptism stories with your family? Consider making it a new part of your Christmas traditions.



Week 3: Monday

Looking Forward

For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Romans 8:21, NLT

Children are our models when it comes to looking forward, especially at Christmas. They giggle their joy. It's contagious. They can turn an ordinary day into a party.

In a sense, creation is doing the same thing. There is a seamless connection between God and His created world. Creation doesn't question or argue. Flowers keep blooming and dying. Trees put out leaves and let them go. They know that it is all forward movement.

What about us? Are we looking forward or backward? Advent reminds us there is always something ahead. God isn't finished. Every day is another brushstroke in the Great Picture He is creating. It should make us expectant and downright giddy that God is still working His creative magic. Keep looking forward so that you will "wait eagerly" to see God at work.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- What Advent truth helps you look forward no matter what circumstance pulls you back?
- Where does creation remind you about forward movement?

Week 3: Tuesday

Joy to the World!

*Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy!
Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD,
for he is coming! Psalm 96:12-13, NLT*

We sing many songs at Christmas about Jesus' first coming. But do we know the song that creation sings to look forward to the second coming? Do we tremble with excitement that Jesus will come again and turn this world right side up!

Christmas is our rehearsal for the next Advent. We need to shake with excitement and tremble with joy, just like the forests and fields. Jesus is coming again! We need to live this truth so that every unfinished edge of this world will not pull us down. We need this hope so that nothing in this broken world takes our joy away.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- On a windy day, watch the leaves flutter. Think about it as their excitement at what they know God is doing. Are you as excited?
- How might the words of "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" be applied to the second Advent of Christ?

Week 3: Wednesday

Prized Possession

*He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word.
And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.
James 1:18, NLT*

God chose us before we were born. We were not left like last picks for a schoolyard team. We were valued from the beginning. But not in the way this world values.

As important as all creation is to God, we are more important. God knew we needed more than an earthly birth to understand our worth. He sent Jesus as the Word to help us understand the eternal, always present, ever lifting love of God for us.

Has it worked? Do we live as the treasured children of God because of Jesus? If we only know His salvation without knowing the intimate, identity-raising, soul-satisfying love of God we live shortchanged.

Jesus came to show us how treasured we are. Unfortunately, sometimes we stand among the Pharisees with legalistic leans. Or we can be tax collectors who think we are entitled to whatever we can grab for ourselves.

Advent is our time to contemplate the great opening of God's heart and find our place in it. Love made the arduous journey, crossed the great divide between Heaven and earth to give us so many new reasons to sing. Have we lost our song? The only way to

recapture it is to take our eyes off our broken world long enough to see Love looking straight through us, all the way to our neediness and loving us *there*.

Without God's Love as expressed in Jesus, we cannot live above the confusion of this world. We get caught in it, trapped by it. However, through the pure, unmatched love of God expressed through Jesus; we can be new-born in a love that heals our souls and restores perspective.

We are so very loved. We should wake every morning to the new gifts of God's love. We should live each day expressing our well-loved identity in Christ. Nothing else makes sense in our torn apart world. We must be the ones who demonstrate how being completely immersed in irresistible and heart-changing love makes all the difference we need.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- How does being wholly loved by God raise us above the confusion of the world?
- Do something for someone else just because God loves you so completely.



Week 3: Thursday

Birth Pains

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Romans 8:22, NLT

Creation doesn't always sing. Sometimes she groans with hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. Scripture calls them birth pains. What are they birthing? Is there something in their DNA that remembers a different garden? A harmony between Heaven and earth? Is creation remembering and mourning its loss? Perhaps.

If we only try to make peace with our environment without making peace with God, creation will continue to groan. Instead, we use Advent to join the groans of creation for all the ways our world has turned against God. We reject sentimental leanings and join the lament for the world God hoped we could make. But it is not an eternal lament. One day the pains of this world will give way to something new and give us a new song to sing. We wait for eagerly for that day.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Where is creation groaning today? How might it be a picture of God's heart?
- Stewardship is God's answer to environmental groanings. How do you practice stewardship of God's creation?

Week 3: Friday

Our Ultimate Glue

*He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.
Colossians 1:17, NLT*

We've all said it, "This world is coming apart at the seams." We see cracks widening. We feel profound losses we never expected to experience. However, we must also recognize how Jesus is holding everything together until it is time to make all things new.

Jesus holds us together, too. He holds us when the normal of our daily world feels unglued. He comes to make something new in places where we want normal back. He holds us with a love that will not let us go. In all the changes this Christmas season brings, remember that Jesus still holds everything together. Be still and know his securing hold.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- How can Jesus be the glue you need for the scattered and broken parts of your life?
- What rhythms of nature act as your glue? The dependable effects of gravity? Seasons? Use them to experience the security of what Jesus holds together.

Week 3: Saturday

Join the Choir!

Let the whole earth sing to the LORD! Each day proclaim the good news that he saves. 1 Chronicles 16:23, NLT

Listen carefully to the carols of Christmas. Many point to God's mission to save the world. If we're not careful, we will get so focused on our individual relationship with God that we forget about God's mission. We have a story to tell and good news to share. Why do we keep it to ourselves?

The whole earth has been singing God's salvation song. Every bloom and branch. Every sunrise and sunset. They raise their song simply by doing what they were created to do. We need to join their choir. God will give us the music, but we must sing the song. Everything we do during these days of Advent should point to God's gift and His mission. Does it?

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

Review these lines from Christmas carols. Which one helps you share your song of a soul set free?

- *The king of Kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
"What Child is This?"*
- *Thou came, O Lord, with the living word
that should set your people free.
"Thou Didst Leave They Throne"*

- *No more let sin and sorrow grow.*
Joy to the World
- *Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.*
"O Little Town of Bethlehem"
- *God and sinners reconciled.*
"Hark the Herald Angels Sing!"
- *Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!*
"Good Christian Men Rejoice"
- *Christ was born on Christmas Day*
to save us all from Satan's power.
"God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen"
- *From fears and sin release us*
"Come, Though Long-expected Jesus"



Week 4: Sunday

The Angels' Song

So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it. For the message God delivered through angels has always stood firm. Hebrews 2:1-2, NLT

We sentimentalize the angels' song. Perhaps we don't appreciate their mission as much as we should. They were messengers from God sent into a world at war with God to wake us up. They knew the cost and may have wondered how their message would be received. However, they didn't come hesitant or careful. They came bold and blazing.

The message they brought still has our name and address on it. Nothing else we do on this earth brings Heaven and nature together more than receiving the gift of salvation and worshiping our God who sent it. That is our Advent priority today as we gather for worship. Listen very carefully for the Truth of Christmas today. Find the message you need to live this week as you look forward to a day of celebration.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Place an angel ornament where you will see it every morning. How can this representation of a heavenly messenger help you worship the God who sent them?
- How are you imitating their obedience and joy in sharing the message of Christmas?

Week 4: Monday

Obedient Messengers

Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out his plans, listening for each of his commands. Psalm 103:20, NLT

If angels teach us anything, it is how perfectly they obey God. God instructs and angels obey. God says go and they go. God gives the message, and they don't edit or change it. They don't argue or complain. We have a lot to learn from angels!

While angels are God's servants from Heaven; we are God's servants on earth. Angels intersect lives by surprise, but we live *with* the people God wants us to minister to. We have messages to deliver, too. They are messages that God has recruited us to share. We need to make sure we are not a breach in God's plan for sharing how Jesus came and why. Listen for directions before you look at what *you* think you need to do today. Today is a day of Good News and someone in your world needs to hear it.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Who could use a message of hope? Who needs to know you care and God cares. Don't overthink it or overcomplicate it; just be willing to deliver it.
- How could you involve your family in delivering a message from God?

Week 4: Tuesday

Keeping Watch

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Luke 2:8, NIV

Shepherds were simple folk. They lived unnoticed and unappreciated. Yet, they did their job. They watched over the sheep in their care. The night that changed the world, they were watching; but they weren't looking for angels. However, because they were watching, they saw what God sent and heard the message that changed their world and ours.

This is our week to keep watch. We watch for family who may be coming. We watch for mail deliveries. But are we watching for what God wants to send? We need to make sure we do not get so caught up in everything we think needs to be done that we forget to watch for what God is doing and sending our way. Keep watch. Over your family. Over your neighborhood. Over your friends. It's the best way to be ready in case God wants to interrupt your plans with His.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- As you go through your day, keep watch. Look for sad or weary faces. Look for slumped shoulders. Find someone God wants you to share an "angel message" with.
- If you are a list maker, always keep a line empty for God to fill His way.

Week 4: Wednesday

The Armies of Heaven

*Suddenly the angel was joined by a vast host of others—
the armies of heaven—praising God and saying
“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth.”
Luke 2:13-14, NLT*

In most of the Christmas story, one angel comes to deliver a message. So why did the armies of Heaven show up for the shepherds? Did they need the overwhelming presence of so many to underline the importance of this announcement?

Or was this such a momentous day from Heaven’s perspective, that every angel wanted to be there? I wonder if the angels were so giddy with excitement they could hardly wait to get this message out and refused to stay back on this night of nights.

Were they there to protect the message? Several times in the Old Testament, God ordered His armies of angels to make an appearance to frighten or overcome enemies of God’s will. Were they expecting push-back?

One fact is sure, on this night, God pulled back the curtain that divided Heaven from earth and gave the shepherds, and us, a vision of His heavenly army.

When I think of angel armies, it’s hard to picture them as Heaven’s traveling choir sent to wow us with their harmony. Instead, I see a

picture of them with swords safely in their sheaths, but ready just in case.

Weren’t we supposed to take the angel message and make it our own? Could we be so bold this Christmas to believe that God wants us to His army on earth? Do we understand that we have been drafted to proclaim the same message of peace? Not a negotiated peace. Not just a put-down-your-weapons peace. Not a meet-in-the-middle peace.

No. This Peace came through the divide between Heaven and earth to demonstrate a way of peace we still have not learned. This Peace was the full manifestation of God’s heart and will. While we see this Peace as a helpless baby in a corn crib at Christmas, make no mistake; he was the embodiment of all that God wants us to learn about peace.

Do we need an army of angels to remind us of where we have lost sight of God’s peace? Do we understand that God’s peace came to transform our hearts so completely that our minds and perspectives follow? Do we need God to pull back the curtain again and let us see the real enemies we face?

As we get ready for Christmas, we need to get ready for Peace. We need to let the Peace of God reintroduce Himself to us. We need God’s heart of peace because our hearts are mired in too many struggles that will not bring peace.

Instead of fighting where peace doesn't exist around us, why not make sure that Peace lives in our homes, around our tables, in our extended families. Consider it practice work because if we can live His peace in our daily lives, we can share peace more strongly where it will make the difference God intended. People are watching and listening more than we think. Let's find a way to live a harmony they can't ignore.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Find 3 verses about peace and alternate reading one every day. Make time for this just like you make time for any other health-protecting rhythm.
- How can you pass the peace in your family when someone is having a hard time?



Week 4: Thursday

What's the Hurry?

Come on, let's go to Bethlehem!
Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened . . .
[and] they ran to the village. Luke 2:15, 16, NLT

We hurry about a lot of things that won't make any difference after Christmas passes on the calendar. How could we step back and make sure we are hurrying for the right reason?

The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem. They ran to the village. I wonder how many doors they knocked on, how many stables they peeked into? They had one mission, to find the baby the angels announced. They presented the only gift they brought: themselves. They worshipped. There was no other response that made sense.

There is only one reason to hurry today: to see Jesus, to welcome him, and to celebrate Him. To gather family close. To rehearse the story. And to worship.

Don't forget to worship.

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- What do you need to finish before Christmas? What will make the most difference *after* Christmas?
- Look at a nativity picture from a book or Christmas cards. Where is hurry on their faces? How can you come to Christmas with the same expression?

Week 4: Christmas Eve

Ready or Not

There was they baby, lying in the manger.

Luke 2:16b, NLT

Jesus came to inexperienced parents, in a stable without a cradle, in a village crowded with strangers completely unaware of the miracle. So much can happen under our nose and go unnoticed.

The good news is that Jesus came, ready or not. He came to us. He came *for* us. He, the Creator, became the created. His coming demonstrated a balance between Heaven and nature we must experience in our hearts before we can see it happen anywhere else.

The question for this day is *not* are you ready for the Christmas *you* planned. The question is are you ready for the Christmas God planned?

Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- Consider creating a baby-in-straw focal point in your home, especially if there are young children. Gather everyone for the story. Share what Jesus means in your life. Ask for others to share. Close with a prayer or song like “Away in a Manger.”

- Include bits of nature at your Christmas table. It could be a piece of fir tied to a napkin, a pinecone as a name card, nuts and fruits scattered, a cranberry napkin ring. Find a way to talk about how Heaven and nature came together on Christmas.
- Where is your place in the harmony between heaven and nature? How does your celebration add to the angels’ song and creation’s harmony?



Week 4: Christmas Day

All Praise!

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Psalm 15: 6

Praise God from whom all blessing flows!



Praise God

For shepherds bowing in a stable

Who came running to see Jesus.



Praise God for Mary and Joseph

Who obeyed God against logic and practicality

To remind us that obedience has a price

But a greater reward.



Praise God for Jesus

Who changes our world

While hopes

And nature trembles



Praise God for Jesus

Who wants to bring

Peace to the world

From our hearts

Where He loves to live.



Praise God!

Yes, let all who have breath this day

Praise God!



Week 4: The Day after Christmas

Reclaiming Heaven and Nature's Song

*He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see what he has done and be amazed.
They will put their trust in the LORD. Psalm 40:3, NLT*

We have taken a four-week look at the song God intended for Heaven and earth to share from the beginning of creation. They are our prompters teaching us a harmony we have not learned yet. Unfortunately, it is a song we don't hear easily. Instead we hear the voices of anger, discord, fear, and mistrust only to remind us of what is broken.

Is it possible that God is trying to teach us a greater song, a song for everyone's eternal good? Until Christ returns, we are God's best option to sing and live His song of a soul set free from the pinch and pull of self-centeredness. We are His choir now. I wonder if the angels are watching us to see what we do with the music they taught.

Let's make this the year we take the song Jesus brought and let it transform our hearts so that we live the unshakable faith in every way possible. Let's not allow Heaven and nature to sing alone. We were created for this song, and we must sing it until our last breath.



Bring Heaven and Nature Closer:

- What reminders will you keep around to help you sing Heaven and nature's song?
- What scripture do you need to look at every day to remind you how to live the song God sent us in Jesus?

What I've learned this Advent:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____
