

# *Old Tales Come True*

## Advent Meditations

### • Day 1 •

#### MUSICAL SELECTION

The Light Came Down, *Josh Garrels*

#### READING

There is a light  
Bright star shining  
In the dark night  
*Old tales... come true*

For many people across the world celebrating this Christmas season, the story of Jesus birth is just that—an old tale. A story.

And for the nation of Israel waiting that dark night, 400 years of fears, hopes, and prayers behind them, the coming of the Messiah was probably little more than that—an old tale, spoken hundreds of years ago from mouths of prophets and kings. Hints, clues, and signs, that barely added up. A story.

For many of us, that's probably how this all started out. A little girl, on her mother's lap, or at Sunday school, or reading a children's Bible, hearing a story, about a man named Jesus.

But for the believer in Christ, that's not where it ends. The story takes root, rings true, takes shape, becomes real. And things are never the same again. In some ways, our entire lives are a process of the story becoming realer and realer, until it's the most real thing we know.

It reminds me of a childhood story. At the end of C.S. Lewis' *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lucy and Edmund learn that they're too grown up to return to Narnia, the country they've come to love:

"Please Aslan," says Lucy. "Before we go back, will you tell us when we can come back to Narnia again?"

"Dearest," said Aslan very gently, "you and your brother will never come back to Narnia. You are too old, children, and you must begin to come close to your own world now."

"It isn't Narnia, you know," sobbed Lucy. "It's *you*. We shan't meet *you* there. And how can we live, never meeting *you*?"

"But you shall meet me, dear one," said Aslan.

"Are you there too, Sir?" said Edmund.

"I am," said Aslan. "But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, **that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.**"

I think for Lewis, this is a sort of story within a story, an opportunity to explain that he's written these books for the little girls and boys who read them, not to entertain them, but so that they might know the Lion of Judah in their own world better.

And indeed, this is why all the *true* stories are told. This is why the Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming King and the people of Israel handed the old tales down from generation to generation—so that when He arrived, the people would know him.

This is why Jesus came to earth in the first place—so that we might know the Father better. As John Stott wrote in *Basic Christianity*,

“When our minds begin to think about God, they are bewildered! We grope around in the dark. We flounder helpless out of our depth. There is no data for us to make use of. We cannot touch, see, or hear God directly. Yet the Christian faith is based on the assertion that there **once was a time when God chose to speak**, and to clothe himself with a body that could be seen and touched.”

This is why the apostles told and retold the story of Jesus, though it cost them their lives. As John says:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked at and our hands have touched*—this we tell also to you concerning the Word of life.”

The assertion of the Bible, and the apostles, and the whole Christian faith, is that the stories are real—can we touched, seen, and heard—in the person of Jesus. And we tell these stories each year and all through the year so that we can know Him more and more, and through him the Father.

This is the call on us, as we grow up together—to know him better. Ephesians 4 says,

“There is one body and one Spirit... one hope...; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

He has given each one of us gifts through the generosity of Christ... that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in that one faith and **in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

And as we grow up, knowing him better, our own lives become stories that reflect back the fullness of Christ to one another and to those who don't yet know him. They become new places where the character of Christ, his kindness, goodness, holiness, faithfulness, care, conviction, and truth, take on flesh, as it were. It will look imperfect, unlike the incarnation when for once we could see the perfection of God in human form. Our lives will be a dim and cloudy mirror of the true glory of God. Like Paul says to the Corinthians, “we know only in part” and we see only “in a mirror, dimly”. But we press on for the fuller revealing of Christ in our lives, with the rest of Paul's promise—and calling—in mind:

“When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face-to-face. Now

I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

It’s my prayer that this advent season, as we listen to the old stories that first introduced us to Jesus, we would, corporately and individually, meet with Him tonight, in the comfort of the sanctuary and in the sanctity of our own hearts. And come to know him better.

### **Logos**

*Stuart McAlpine*

Father,  
They say that penmanship reveals the man.  
We scribe and others read the hidden soul.

They say that once you wrote a single Word;  
That swaddled vellum fast-bound all your life.

Please dip your quill into my inked heart’s well  
And grace-stroke once again that Word in me...  
Jesus.

## • Day 2 •

### Act 1: Get Ready

### **MUSICAL SELECTION**

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

### **Jesus Storybook Bible: Get Ready!**

*Sally Lloyd-Jones*

“I can’t stop loving you.  
You are my heart’s treasure,  
But I lost you!  
Now I am coming back for you.

I am going to send my Messenger—the Promised One.  
The One you have been waiting for.  
The Rescuer.

He is coming. So, get ready!”

### **READING**

*"A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God."*

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah. He and his wife Elizabeth were righteous in the sight of God, but they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah was serving as priest before God, an angel of the Lord appeared to him. When Zechariah saw

• Day 3 •

him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah—to make ready a people ready for the Lord.”

Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. John asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

*Luke 1:5-20, 63-66*

**MUSICAL SELECTION**

Light of the World, *Lauren Daigle*

**READING**

**He Has Come**

*Andrew Roycroft*

Darkness, unspeakable and unspeaking  
Darkness. Silence, not of contemplation,  
Nor of craning, halt-breathed expectation,  
But silence of the now non-verbal God,  
Void quiet, out-of-form condemnation.  
This is all, for generation after  
Generation, ten times over, silence,  
Darkness, a people un-peopled, distant.

Now, over the deep of barren gloom, over  
The depths of a barren womb, life breathes again.  
An angel breaking rank speaks, “Zechariah!  
Your wife will bear a son, even now when  
Tears of youth have dried in age, acceptance  
Must now give way, for the Messiah will  
Have one to speak his name – like the gathering  
Of light in glowering clouds before the sun  
Casts off the shroud of night, and breaks a Day  
Whose only end will be consummation  
On the Final Day. John must speak these things.”

This child, unexpected, now new-expected  
Leaps to greet the One in Mary’s womb to

Whom he will witness among darkened minds;  
Leaps at the sheer presence of this Other,  
The incarnate God, who now is woven,  
Worked into human form within his mother's form.

But still, darkness. The keen-eyed Simeon  
Who will not see death 'til he sees the Son,  
Waits in faith amidst the oblivion  
Of broken law, and these stricken lives  
Who know no mercy, only sacrifice.  
And Anna, rising every day, shuffles  
Through the Temple bounds, praying, that the Lord  
Would ground these redemption words, long left off.

Light, unspoken and unspeakable light  
Breaks now. The Word at last made flesh, he comes,  
He comes, the Son of God eternal comes!  
Into the broken yards of drought-dry bones  
Into the blasphemy of our godless scraping by,  
Into our hearts he comes, transcendent God,  
The Son, the majestic uncompounded Lord,  
He comes, the timeless One unbounded,  
The world-by-his-word forming King  
Can now be found at an address, in the mess  
Of our neighbourhood, in the flesh of our  
Personhood, he comes the one who is wholly,  
Holy Other, he comes to be our Saviour  
Our Messiah, our Lamb and Lion  
Lord and light, our deliverer  
Who will carry our shame though not ashamed  
To call us brothers. He comes, and all our  
Words though wide as worlds, and all our songs  
Though voiced in grandest composition,

Can never carry the incomparable weight  
Of this one who comes, whose incarnation  
Is our hope, our joy, heaven's confirmation  
That though light from us was long withheld  
God has shattered the sin that was our hell  
He comes, he has come, Immanuel.

## • Day 4 •

### Act 2: The 400-year Old Sign

#### MUSICAL SELECTION

Gabriel's Message, *Matt Maher*

#### Jesus Storybook Bible: Heaven Breaks Through *Sally Lloyd-Jones*

“Because God loves us with a Never Stopping,  
Never Giving Up, Unbreaking,  
Always and Forever Love—  
Heaven is breaking through!  
He is sending us a Light from Heaven  
To shine on us like the sun  
To shine on those who live in darkness  
And in the shadow of death,  
To guide our feet in the way of peace.”

#### READING

*“The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*

#### The Birth of Jesus

*Adapted by Suzanne Lieurance*

There was a young woman named Mary who was promised to marry a man named Joseph. One day, God sent the angel Gabriel to visit Mary.

"Greetings," said Gabriel. "Do not be afraid, Mary. I have wonderful news for you. You have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son! You shall name the child Jesus."

Mary stared up at Gabriel. "How could this be? I am not even married yet."

Gabriel answered, "The Holy Spirit will visit you. The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

"I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you have said."

When Joseph her fiancé found out that she was pregnant, he planned to break the engagement quietly, for he was a good man.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

*Matthew 1:18-23*

• Day 5 •

Act 3: The Branch of Jesse

**MUSICAL SELECTION**

O Come, All Ye Faithful

**Jesus Storybook Bible: He's Here!**

*Sally Lloyd-Jones*

Everything was ready. The moment God had been waiting for was here at last! God was coming to help his people, just as he promised in the beginning. But how would he come? What would he be like? What would he do? Mountains would have bowed down. Seas would have roared. Trees would have clapped their hands. But the earth held its breath... As silent as snow falling, he came in. And when no one was looking, in the darkness, he came.

**READING**

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.”*

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph and Mary also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the

house and line of David. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

*Luke 2:1-7*

**The House of Christmas**

*G.K. Chesterton*

There fared a mother driven forth  
Out of an inn to roam;  
In the place where she was homeless  
All men are at home.  
The crazy stable close at hand,  
With shaking timber and shifting sand,  
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand  
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,  
And strangers under the sun,  
And they lay their heads in a foreign land  
Whenever the day is done.  
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,  
And chance and honor and high surprise,  
But our homes are under miraculous skies  
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,  
Where the beasts feed and foam;  
Only where He was homeless  
Are you and I at home;  
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,

But our hearts we lost - how long ago!  
In a place no chart nor ship can show  
Under the sky's dome.

This world is wild as an old wives' tale,  
And strange the plain things are,  
The earth is enough and the air is enough  
For our wonder and our war;  
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings  
And our place is put in impossible things  
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings  
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening  
Home shall men come,  
To an older place than Eden  
And a taller town than Rome.  
To the end of the way of the wandering star,  
To the things that cannot be and that are,  
To the place where God was homeless  
And all men are at home.

## • Day 6 •

### Act 4: The Lord Comes to His Temple

#### MUSICAL SELECTION

Mary, Did You Know? *Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene*

#### READING

*"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts."*

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.”

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising



of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There was also a prophetess, Anna, who left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Joseph and Mary returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

*Luke 2:21-40*

## • Day 7 •

### MUSICAL SELECTION

Worthy of Your Name,  
*Brenton Brown, Sean Curran, Brett Younker*

### READING

#### The Mary Meditation

#### Mary's Men

*Stuart McAlpine*

He always was our pride and joy, my dear,  
And yet I felt strange heart-stabs as He grew.  
Unsummoned in my dreams there would appear  
A sage who said a sword would pierce me through.  
He learned the trade: He hammered, chiseled, planed,  
And finished tasks no sooner than begun.  
His hands were scarred and calloused, sinewed, veined,  
But do they not say “like father, like son”?

The people hung upon his words, my dear,  
He told them stories never heard before.  
He spoke about a kingdom that was near,  
Announcing that He was the key, the door.  
I used to hide beneath a shaded tree,  
Not knowing whether I should stay or run.  
At home His brothers could no more agree  
That we could still say “like father, like son”.

I pondered all within my heart, my dear,  
Sins were forgiven, nature was controlled;  
The blind would open eyes, the deaf would hear;

Before Him demon power would loose its hold.  
And yet they killed my firstborn, hung Him high;  
They caught Him in the web their lies had spun.  
The reason why they said He had to die?  
He dared to claim that “like father, like son”.

I must confess I lost my way, my dear.  
I thought back to those things I had been told:  
Truths learned by wise men, garnered by a seer,  
And heard by shepherds watching in a fold.  
My weeping was distracted by a cry:  
“He’s risen - death is conquered - heaven’s won!”  
Then I remembered, “Son of the Most High.”  
Truly, my dearest, “like Father, like Son”.

## **The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe: The Spell Begins to Break**

*C.S. Lewis*

Lucy and her siblings have come via a magical wardrobe to the world of Narnia, a fantastic land of fauns and talking animals which is held in perpetual winter under the power of a witch’s spell. They’ve discovered that their coming to Narnia was foretold by an ancient prophecy which links their arrival with the end of the witch’s reign and the return of the Emperor Over the Sea’s son, the mighty Aslan. On the run from the witch, they encounter an unexpected figure:

“Come on!” cried Mr. Beaver, who was almost dancing with delight. “Come and see! This is a nasty knock for the Witch! It looks as if her power is already crumbling.”

“What do you mean, Mr. Beaver?” asked Peter.

“Didn’t I tell you that she’d made it always winter and never Christmas? Well, just come and see!”

And then they were all at the top of the bank and did see.

It was a sledge, and it was reindeer with bells on their harness. And on the sledge sat a person whom everyone knew the moment they set eyes on him. He was a huge man in a bright red robe with a hood that had fur inside it and a great white beard that fell like a foamy waterfall over his chest. Some of the pictures of Father Christmas in our world make him look only funny and jolly. But now that the children actually stood looking at him they didn’t find it quite like that. They felt very glad, but also solemn.

“I’ve come at last,” said he. “She has kept me out a long time, but I have got in at last. Aslan is on the move. The Witch’s magic is weakening.”

And Lucy felt running through her that deep shiver of gladness which you only get if you are being solemn and still.

“And now,” said Father Christmas, “for your presents. They are tools, not toys. The time to use them is perhaps near at hand. Bear them well.” With these words he handed to Peter a shield and a sword.

“Susan, Eve’s Daughter, these are for you,” and he handed her a bow and a quiver full of arrows and a little ivory horn. “You must use the bow only in great need. And when you put this horn to your lips and blow it, then, wherever you are, I think help of some kind will come to you.”

Last of all he said, “Lucy, Eve’s Daughter,” and Lucy came forward. He gave her a little bottle of what looked like glass and small dagger. “In this bottle,” he said, “there is a cordial made of the juice of one of the fire-flowers that grow in the mountains of the sun. If you or any of your friends is hurt, a few drops of this will restore them. And the dagger is to defend yourself at great need.”

Then he cried out, “Merry Christmas! Long live the true King!” and cracked his whip, and he and the reindeer and the sledge and all were out of sight before anyone realized that they had started.

## **From Advent Overture**

*Stuart McAlpine*

But what has all this got to do with the Advent story, you may ask? Isn’t *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* less about Bethlehem and more about Gethsemane?

I am looking for a wardrobe door into the story of Christ’s birth. Allow me to slip through the furs with Lucy into the place that was “always winter and never Christmas.” That is the perfect image for the historical and personal terrain we have already been encountering in the gospel narratives. The White Witch’s wolves were no less than the Romans legions that ground their heel into the Jewish spirit, and her murderous megalomania was no less than Herod’s. The despair of the beavers was earthed in Elizabeth’s womb and the hopelessness of the fauns was mouthed in Zechariah’s dispirited prayers. The Narnians’ longings for Aslan were more than matched by the desperation of Messianic hope that had languished in silence for so long. Isaiah described Narnia well: “gloom... distress... people walking in darkness... living in the land of the shadow of death... the warrior’s boot... the oppressor’s rod.” Faith was frozen with no thaw in sight. The land of Israel was Narnian. So where does Lucy come in?

Lucy in this fairy-tale leads the other characters in the way to approach and respond to the coming of Aslan, [mirroring] Mary in the way to approach and respond to coming divinity, to the gift of revelation and salvation, to the wooing of God, to the brooding of the Holy Spirit: “Be it unto me according to your Word.”

And the story of Mary no more ended at the manger, than Lucy’s did after her first trip through the wardrobe. In John’s gospel we read, “Near the cross of Jesus stood his

mother.” Mary not only accepted the incarnation, she accepted the cross, and acknowledged that this was “the atoning sacrifice” for not only her sins but the sins of the whole world. No doubt she was among the group of women that went to the tomb to take spices and found it empty. Mary was among that number upon whom the Holy Spirit fell. Most often you see depictions of Mary with a halo around her head. How about a tongue of fire upon it? And what about her declaration of the wonderful glories of Jesus in another tongue? Mary, in whom Christ was once carried, would now know that she lived in Him, and He in her, because she had received his Spirit.

This advent, let us go to a barn where Jesus came to us; to a hill where Jesus died for us; to an empty tomb where we too were raised with Him from the power of death and sin; to an upper room where Jesus gives His Holy Spirit.