



AN UNLIKELY
advent

“Nearly 2,000 years ago, God did the ‘Unlikely’ – He showed up. Before He arrived, He revealed His coming to the most ‘Unlikely’ cast of characters with an ‘Unlikely’ message. And when He arrived, well, He came in the most ‘Unlikely’ way. Regardless of how ‘Unlikely’ it all was, when God showed up, He brought with Him Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.” - Michael Davis

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How to use this ebook:

This Christmas Season, GENESIS will celebrate 'An Unlikely Advent.' Hope, Peace, Joy and Love – these will be the themes we celebrate this Advent Season. And the good news of Advent is that God is still using 'Unlikely' people to bring about Hope, Peace, Joy and Love to a world in desperate need of knowing the God that offers us ALL of this and so much more as we look to Him and Him alone!

In this book, we will have daily Advent devotions that focus on some of the most unlikely people from Scripture, and how Jesus brought them Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love through their unlikely circumstances. Some of the following material weaves real Biblical facts and cultural data into imaginary scenarios so that the reader will more easily identify with the Biblical message. These are not meant to be taken literally, but only to supplement the reader.

Our hope, is that through this devotional, you would not only see that God can use the people in the Bible to do great things, but that He can and wants to use YOU to do great things too!

Everyday

- We are excited to offer a few verses for you to meditate upon each day
- After the Scriptures, a short devotional will focus on our weekly theme and unlikely character
- Then, a few questions will try to address how God wants to use you this year to do something incredible
- Finally, we will end each day in prayer

Table of Contents

Week 3: An Unlikely Joy

Day 1:

An Unlikely Move 7

Day 2:

An Unlikely Birth 10

Day 3:

An Unlikely Crib 13

Day 4:

An Unlikely Invitation 16

Day 5:

Unlikely Guests 19

Day 6:

An Unlikely JOY 22

Week 3:

An Unlikely Joy

"When large numbers of people share their joy in common, the happiness of each is greater because each adds fuel to the other's flame."

- Augustine

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.."

- Habakkuk 3:18

Day 1:

Today's Verse: **Micah 5:2**

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf."

Setting the Scene

Joseph had taken Mary to be his wife. And, by all accounts, they were ready to begin their new life together in Nazareth. That is until Caesar Augustus issued the decree for the entire Roman world to be taxed. And, unlike most places, Jewish males needed to present themselves to be registered in the town of their ancestors, which for Joseph was the city of David, also known as Bethlehem. Being as though he was now married to Mary, she also had to travel the ninety uphill miles to be registered with him.

This move had not been in the plans for either of them. They would have been perfectly content spending the rest of their lives in Nazareth. They had grown up there; met each other there; and had probably talked about raising their children there. Joseph had likely begun establishing his carpentry business and may have had many clients and contacts to keep him busy. Also, considering that Mary was now more than eight months pregnant and was hardly in any condition to make the journey, the likelihood that they would have stayed in Nazareth was almost certain.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Move**

While it would have been easier and more comfortable for them to have stayed in Nazareth, this was not God's plan for Joseph, Mary, or for Jesus. Long ago by the mouth of the prophet Micah, God had announced that His Son was going to be born in the city of David, which now meant somehow getting the pregnant Mary to Bethlehem. But it was the way that God brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem that was even more unlikely.

God did not send His angel to reappear to Mary. He did not give Joseph another dream. He did not tell Zechariah by a miraculous appearance or give Elizabeth another sign. He did not have a job offer open up in Bethlehem, or cause major troubles in Nazareth. What God did was completely unlikely, in that He had a pagan Roman Caesar issue the order that would bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. Thousands of miles away, without ever knowing what he was really doing, the greedy Caesar issued the very order that would ensure that prophecy was fulfilled! Wow!

Even beyond that, God had the Romans rise to power, so that they would be the ones demanding taxes. He guided Jewish customs so that Jewish men would report to their ancestral towns instead of paying taxes where they were already living. He guided the line and family of David so that Joseph would be born. He even guided the passions and desires of Mary and Joseph so that these unlikely people would meet and fall in love. None of this was by chance, and it was all accomplished by the wonderful and beautiful plan of God to bring this world His Son.

Today, no matter what we are facing God still has a plan. That plan may not seem very plain to us in the moment, but He is still leading and directing all things to magnify the name of His Son and to bring us great joy.

Discussion:

When you step back and look at your life as a whole, what are some ways you have been able to see God at work?

Why do you think it is sometimes hard to see God moving in the midst of our busy lives?

Prayer:

Lord, it is amazing how you orchestrated all of the events surrounding Jesus' birth. How you got Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, fulfilled prophecy, and even did that through the most unlikely Roman Caesar. Today Lord, help me to believe that you are working out the details of my life too. Help me to trust that you have all of this in your hands. Sometimes it is hard for me to see that, but I want to believe it. Will you give me that belief? And, will you give me eyes to see how you are at work? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 2:

Today's Verses: **Luke 2:6, 7a**

⁶And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.
⁷She gave birth to her first child, a son."

Setting the Scene

The journey had probably left Mary overly tired and weary as she walked those dusty miles to Bethlehem. And after she and Joseph arrived they must have been exhausted—especially Mary. Then the pains began. Perhaps at first, Mary was not quite sure if it was her time, since she had never been pregnant before, and had no reference point. But, when there was no doubt that it was the real thing, she probably told Joseph that they needed to hurry and find some place to stay. Quickly!

In Bethlehem the accommodations for travelers were primitive. Bethlehem was not a huge city and did not lie on any major roads, so there were probably few places to stay. And unlike the storybooks, there were not any hotels with angry innkeepers. There was only a little place, just inside town, where travelers could lodge and take a break from their journey.

Typically these buildings were a series of stalls built on the inside of an enclosure and opened up to a common yard where the animals were kept. All that was generally provided to travelers was fodder for the animals they brought, and a fire to cook on. But on that day,

when the expectant parents arrived, nothing at all was available, not even one of those crude stalls. And despite the urgency, there was no room available for them.

So it was likely that Mary gave birth to Jesus in the common courtyard, where the travelers' animals were tethered. Normally a midwife would attend to a young woman, because Jewish custom did not allow the male to be in the room while his wife was giving birth, but there was no one but Joseph to help her. And, since neither one of them knew what they were doing, this was likely a frustrating delivery.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Birth**

As Joseph watched his new bride writhe in pain, I wonder what was going through his mind. Was he nervous because he did not know what to do? Was he frustrated that all of this was happening in the most unexpected place? Did he feel powerless and ashamed because he could not afford better accommodations for her? We may not know the answers to these questions, but what we know about that night is absolutely shocking.

You see, the birth of God's Son did not occur in a clean well-furnished room, it occurred out in the elements. Mary was completely vulnerable and utterly exposed. There was sweat and pain and blood and cries as she reached up to the heavens for help. The earth was cold and hard. The smell of birth mixed with the stench of manure and acrid straw probably made a contemptible bouquet to welcome the newborn king, who was first held in a carpenter's trembling hands. The baby's limbs were waving helplessly as if he was falling through space—his face grimacing as he gasped for his first breath and let out that first cry that pierced the night. This was certainly an unlikely birth.

Sometimes God wraps up His best gifts in the most unexpected paper. To the world, He has given the greatest gift of all! Yet, the world was not expecting it to come wrapped up in strips of cloth.

Discussion:

What are some of the unlikely gifts that God has brought into your life?

As you reflect on today's lesson, what stood out to you about the birth of God's Son?

Prayer:

Lord, sometimes you bring your greatest gifts in the most unexpected packages. You bless us with gifts that we would have never expected. And Lord, I confess that I have not always valued the gift that you have given me in Christ. I do not always look to see the other wonderful gifts that you bring into my life. Lord, will you help me to see these gifts more often and learn to celebrate when I see them? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 3:

Today's Verse: **Luke 2:7b**

"She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them."

Setting the Scene

Once Joseph handed her baby to her, she probably did what all mothers do. As the anxiety faded, the pain disappeared, and the frustration over her surroundings dissipated, she probably sat there in amazement, counting his fingers and toes, wondering if he was really real. She and Joseph likely wiped him off, as clean as they could, with whatever rags were not going to be used for wrapping Him. But, it was hard to see under the light of a small flickering fire.

Once He was cleaned off, Mary would have held him tight to her warm skin, and let the emotions of being a mother set in. After awhile, she would have taken those strips of cloth and wrapped him up tightly to simulate the security he had just felt in her womb. No one but Joseph helped her as she went about her work. Then, before she laid herself down to rest, the only place she found for the Son of God to lay, was in a feeding trough for the local animals.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Crib**

The birth of Christ provides the most incredible example of the work that Jesus undertakes in our lives. You see, every Advent season, and hopefully at other times as well, we are brought again to the wonder of His amazing but most unlikely birth. For no child born into the world that day seemed to have lower prospects than Jesus. The Son of God was born into the world not as a prince but as a pauper. He was not laid in a fine wooden crib, but in a shabby old wooden box that still smelled of last night's left overs that the animals had fought over.

And, when we see our Lord lying in that little feeding trough, in an outdoor courtyard where animals were also born, it should cause us to stop for a moment and stare. It should cause us to pull back the curtains of this incredible scene and peer deep down into the nativity, so that we can re-experience the wonder. And that is that Jesus Christ came to this world to to save the lowliest of sinners; He came in the lowliest of stations; He laid in the lowliest of beds, so that He could come and rescue us.

You see, the birth of Christ is the most dramatic portrayal of how God views our sin. It is ugly, it is scandalous, it is filthy, and it is surely no place where God would ever want to be. But He loved us so much that He came, first to a wooden trough and last to a wooden cross.

Discussion:

When you close your eyes and imagine that unlikely birth, what does that teach you about Jesus' love for you?

As you reflect on the reason Jesus was born in such a lowly place, what does this teach you about how God views your sin?

Prayer:

Lord, when it came time for you to save sinners, you came to the lowliest possible places in order to teach me what radical things needed to happen in order for you to rescue me. Today, I am reminded of just how offensive my sin is to God and tragic it is for me to go on living in it. Lord, thank you for your unimaginable grace that saved and delivered me, which began in that unlikely little crib! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4:

Today's Verses: **Luke 2:8-15**

⁸That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹²And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." ¹³Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." ¹⁵When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Setting the Scene

While Mary and Joseph were laying their newborn child down into a manger, a group of shepherds were watching their sheep. These were not finely dressed men, who sat playing harps on hilltops, but a rough group of men who fought predators like mountain lions and wolves. These men were not among the powerful ruling class of ancient Israel, who led the brightest and smartest young minds in Jerusalem. No, they were stuck out in the fields to tend some of the

dumbest animals that have ever lived. These were not men who got invited to the social clubs or parties, but men who lived, worked, and slept outdoors. In fact, they probably saw little to no reason to take a bath, since no one had ever come out to the fields to see them. And it was to these men that the Angel of the Lord came.

But not just that, after the angel's message to these shepherds, the "angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." In the twinkling of an eye, the sky went from an ordinary black to an extraordinary glow. A heavenly flash burst upon the sky and suddenly the bewildered shepherds were surrounded by a host of angels! This army of heavens messengers was not 150, not 1,500—but beyond measure. It could have been that every single one of God's angels was there, because this was the most amazing event that had ever happened in the history of the universe. Can you imagine even a single angel staying behind and missing out on this celebration? And it was to these simple shepherds that the messengers of God came!

Devotion: **An Unlikely Invitation**

There was only one group of people that were invited to see the infant Jesus. It was not the high and mighty, it was not the wealthy or the powerful, it was not the religious elites, the synagogue leaders, the Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, scribes or Levites. It was a group of ragtag shepherd whom no one had visited before. And as unlikely as that sounds, the invitation was even more unlikely. For these shepherds were the very ones who were invited to see the King of all creation lying humbly in a manger. And, in a moment, everything they had ever believed to be true about themselves was washed away in the joy of seeing their King. What an unlikely but joyous invitation!

Discussion:

What are some of the places, situations, or beliefs that have robbed you from having joy?

In what areas of your life is God inviting you to leave, so that you can go and see more of Jesus?

Prayer:

Lord, there are many times when I feel like the most unlikely of your followers. I identify with these shepherds in thinking that I deserve to be alone. But Lord, from the moment you were born to the moment you breathed your last, you have not stopped inviting me or pursuing me! You have invited me to follow you, to love you, and to be in relationship with you. Thank you Jesus for loving me, even when there have been times that I was completely unlovable. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5:

Today's Verses: **Luke 2:16-20**

"¹⁶They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them."

Setting the Scene

Once the sky had settled and their eyes had adjusted back to normal, the shepherds were off, leaving behind their sheep to fend for themselves. When they left, they were perhaps no more than a mile from the lodging place where Jesus was born, and without a second thought they were probably sprinting to verify the angels message. Once in town, wide-eyed and panting, they quickly searched the stalls around the perimeter of the enclosure and found the new mother and her baby among the animals. They may have even encountered an angry and overly defensive Joseph, who could have suspected the unlikely shepherds of being midnight robbers, who were a threat to his wife and son. But, however they made their appearance, they saw before their eyes what they had come to see and it was absolutely breathtaking!

Devotion: **Unlikely Guests**

But, just as soon as they had barged in upon Mary and Joseph, they were leaving. They did not need to stay and look at the child, because the angel's message was true. Now all they needed to do was joyfully celebrate God, and wait for the fulfillment that He had promised them in His Son. Because the baby they found would be the savior of the world the shepherds began to announce the good news, telling everyone who would listen about the angels and this wonderful baby's birth. When they left, they continued glorifying and praising God concerning everything they had experienced.

You see, it is not enough to hear about Jesus. It is not enough to peek in the manger and say, "Oh, how wonderful. What a lovely scene. It simply warms my heart." The truth is, even if Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times but was not born within you, you would be eternally lost. The Christ who was born into the world must be born into our heart as well. Religious sentiment, even at Christmas, without the living Christ, is a yellow brick road paved to darkness.

For us today, the Holy Spirit included this story in the Holy Scriptures so we would not miss the point: the real Savior of the world was not Caesar Augustus, nor will it be any great world leader. The Savior of the world is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came to earth veiled in Mary's flesh, who lived in the flesh, died in the flesh, was resurrected in that flesh, and now lives in the same glorified flesh at the right hand of the Father. He has been where we have been in every way and is now the only one capable of delivering us from where we are at. This is the message that these unlikely guests got to partake in! This is the message that brought them great joy!

Discussion:

How has knowing that Jesus Christ brought you great joy?

What are some of the ways you have shown that great joy to others?

What is one thing you could do this week for someone else that would communicate Christ's love for them?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for giving us your most wonderful Son! And, like the shepherds, help me not to be content sitting at His manger, enjoying Him all to myself, but let me instead share His love with others. Whether that is in telling them about Him, showing them Jesus in my kindness and actions, or simply by praying more often for my friends and family who are far from you. Lord, let me share your joy this week. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Day 6:

Today's Verses: **Luke 2:21, 25-38**

²⁵At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰I have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared for all people. ³²He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" ³³Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but **he will be a joy** to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul. ³⁶Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem."

Setting the Scene

Imagine a week has now passed since the first Christmas, when the angels had filled the skies over the fields of Bethlehem as they announced Christ's birth to the amazed shepherds, who then ran to see their newborn Savior-King lying in a manger. Young Mary at this point had hardly recovered from giving birth, as the mental tapes of those unlikely events were probably still playing in her mind: the forced journey to Bethlehem, their frantic search for a place to give birth, her labor under the stars, Joseph anxiously and cluelessly attempting to help her, the list goes on.

And now, one week later, while standing on the temple mount, having just had her first-born son circumcised, Mary was now listening to the praises of two total strangers, Simeon and Anna, who were glorifying God because of her Son! Clearly she was amazed and was probably still trying to get her bearings together after a whirlwind week. But, as she listened to the two witnesses praise God on behalf of her son, it must have brought her heart great joy! In fact, it seems like everyone who met this newborn King had an incredible kind of joy that transcended all of their difficult circumstances and transformed them into brand new people. They had an Unlikely kind of joy!

Devotion: **An Unlikely Joy**

Joseph had many difficult circumstances that should have robbed him of his joy. But, because his joy came from God, there was nothing that was going to stop this man from celebrating. And as he held his newborn adopted son, his life would be forever changed because of the joy that God had brought him. His joy came from God.

Mary had joy from God because she trusted Him with her life, her body, her future, and with everything. She believed that a virgin like her could get pregnant if God said she could, and she was allowed to carry God's one and only son. But, as incredible as Mary was, she was not the source of her joy, since everything within her would have naturally been nervous, fearful, and anxious. But, because she was obedient, God gave her a joy that transcended her circumstances. Her joy came from God.

The shepherds had joy that God really cared about the most unlikely sort of people. That God would invite men like them to enjoy and celebrate His Son. And then, that joy caused them to shout praises at the top of their lungs in order that every single person they saw would hear the incredible news, that Jesus Christ was born! Their joy came from God.

In fact, even two total strangers (Simeon and Anna) were allowed to experience the joy of Christ. It says that the Spirit was upon Simeon and that Anna spent all of her time worshipping and waiting for the coming of the messiah. Their joy came to them from God!

Today, we can have that same kind of joy. The kind of joy that is not dependent upon our circumstances, but is rooted in our God, who is bigger and more powerful than the things we face. So, my prayer is that God would rain His joy on top of you and would allow you to have the hope, peace, joy, and love that is available to you in Jesus Christ.

Discussion:

What are some things you can let go of today that would allow you to experience the joy that God has given you more fully?

What is the one or two things I am going to do today, as a response to the joy God has given me?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for giving me your joy. I have no idea why you would have chosen someone like me to give your joy to, but I am so thankful that you did. Lord, help me to love others more fully, so that they too can experience the joy that comes from God. I pray you would give me opportunities to live this out and to share with others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

“Always be joyful”

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16



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