

An advent wreath is the central focus of the image. It consists of a circular arrangement of green pine branches and brown pinecones. Four candles are placed around the wreath: three are purple and one is white. All four candles are lit, with their flames glowing brightly. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The text 'AN UNLIKELY advent' is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

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

AN UNLIKELY *advent*

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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

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Week 4:

An Unlikely Love

"Though our feelings come and go, his love for us does not."

- C.S. Lewis

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

- John 3:16

Day 1:

Today's Verse: **Matthew 2:1, 2**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

Setting the Scene

While Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were beginning to settle into their new life in Bethlehem, hundreds of miles away, a group of unlikely astrologers were studying the stars, looking for signs that the next great king had been born. These men were incredibly intelligent, savvy, scientific, and on the cutting edge of culture. They were the kind of people who had mastered the wisdom of this world, and could determine many things about the world from their study alone.

On this day, they had determined that a great king would be born in the land of Judah. How? Could it have been that they still had copies of the Old Testament that the Jews brought with them when they were conquered by the Babylonians? Could it have been that they remembered the prophecies of Daniel, who was, himself, a magi of the highest order. Could have been that God revealed these things to them in dreams like He had for Joseph? We simply do not know. But, what we do know is that these men used the wisdom that they had to interpret the astrological patterns in the sky, so that they went looking for the newborn king.

Yet, with all of the wisdom and learning that they had, they were not able to find the newborn king. Why? They certainly got close to Him in Jerusalem (eight miles to be exact), but they did not find Him on their own. They needed help. Why? Because their worldly wisdom was not enough!

Devotion: **An Unlikely Wisdom**

The wise men teach us that the wisdom of this world cannot get us all the way to Jesus. Granted, it can get us fairly well along, but it cannot get us the whole way there. Like biologists who study the wonder and complexities of the cell, or the astronomers who get to behold the beauty and excellence of the universe, the wise men were able to know many things based off of their observation in creation. Most importantly, they knew that there had to be a God who was guiding the events of history and placing stars in the sky for them to follow. Yet, with all of their knowledge of creation, they could not get to the foot of King Jesus' doorsteps. Their wisdom was not enough.

Again, this teaches us that the wisdom of the world can take us a long way, but it will always leave us short of knowing Christ. To know Him, we need a different kind of wisdom, an unlikely kind, that is given to us by God so that we can know Him. We need God's wisdom in order to see Jesus for who He is and experience Him based on what He has done. We need an UNLIKELY wisdom!

Discussion:

What are some of the ways that God reveals Himself to you?

How have you found that the wisdom of this world is helpful? And how have you found it to be lacking?

Prayer:

Lord, if I am going to understand you I need an unlikely kind of wisdom. I know it is easy for me to look for answers in a million different places, but I also know that what I really need is for you to reveal yourself more and more to me. I cannot get far enough with the things I know. I cannot find out enough about you through my own effort. I need you to open my mind, to reveal yourself to me, and to help me understand more and more clearly just how wonderful you are. Help me to have this unlikely wisdom. In Jesus' name, Amen

Day 2:

Today's Verse: **Matthew 2:3, 4**

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

Setting The Scene:

The officer who was in charge of the city gate that night probably saw them coming. And, while tradition states that there were three of these wise men, the Bible does not give such a number. In fact, there could have been an entire caravan of them, which would explain one reason why the whole city was in an uproar, especially king Herod.

Now, Herod was not a true Israelite king, because that honor was only bestowed only upon the ancestors of king David. In fact, Herod wasn't even fully Jewish, much less from the line of David. So when he heard the news that a true king had been born, his only inclination was to find the child and kill him, so that his kingship could be secured.

Devotion: **An Unlikely Affection**

Herod did not understand that God's greatest act of love came in the giving of His one and only Son, because he was too busy loving all the wrong things. His heart was set on power, money, control, and in maintaining his kingdom at all costs. He simply did not have any room in his mind or heart for God. And, as a result he missed what God was doing. He had an unlikely and misplaced affection.

Today, we often love all the wrong things too much while we miss all of the good things that God is doing. We pour ourselves into our work, friends, entertainments, sex, money, and a host of other things, hoping to maintain the little kingdoms that we have built. But, sadly, this often causes us to miss an encounter and an experience with the living God. In fact, anytime that our affections are not on Christ, it is a good chance that our affections are on something else that is blocking us from experiencing the fullness of His love.

Usually, this causes us to sink into a spiritual depression; because none of the wrong things we could ever set our hearts upon will give us lasting hope, peace, joy, and love. We cannot get lasting hope from our appearance because we will not always look the way we do right now. We cannot have any lasting peace in our relationships, since hardships, trial, fighting, and dissention will one day come, and the peace you were banking on will be gone. We cannot have any lasting joy in our performance, since performance demands that you keep on performing without ever stopping to catch your breath. Only God can give our hearts rest, and sadly, many of us will miss Him because we have loved the wrong things. That is an unlikely affection.

Discussion:

What are some of the wrong things that you have been loving?

Why do you find it is hard to let these things go?

Prayer:

Lord, there are many things that I have been placing my hope in other than you. And I would be wrong to say that these things do not bring me some measure of joy. But Lord, you are showing me that while these things can bring a temporary satisfaction in the moment, they cannot ultimately fill my heart with an everlasting hope, peace, joy, and love that my heart is longing for. So, I am praying that you would help me stop loving this thing so that I can start giving all of my heart to you! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 3:

Today's Verses: **Matthew 2:5, 6**

⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: ⁶ 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.' "

Setting The Scene:

In a fit of rage, Herod gathered all the religious leaders together to ask them where the messiah was going to be born. Herod had no problem believing that the messiah really had been born; his only problem was that this messiah had a rightful claim to his throne, which he was not going to allow to happen. So, he called together all of the religious leaders, who would know about these things, in order to ask them where this messiah was going to be born. He believed the reports so firmly that he wanted to murder God's Son.

This was not the case for the Jewish leaders. On the one hand, they would never think of killing their messiah! They had been waiting for centuries for their king to be born and they should have been overjoyed at this news. But, because this news was brought to them by gentiles, they refused to believe it. They knew all of the right answers to the questions Herod was asking, but when the time came for the wise men to go and find Jesus, they went on with their lives; continuing to hope and pray that the messiah would come. The sad fact is that He did come and they missed it, because of their unlikely rejection!

Devotion: **An Unlikely Rejection**

The Jewish leaders loved all of the right things. They knew their Bibles, believed in the prophecies, and were eagerly awaiting the birth of their messiah. Yet, when He came they missed it!

This teaches us that it is possible to love all of the right things, and still miss Jesus. This teaches us that it is entirely possible to have perfect attendance in church, an impeccable record of giving, and an unparalleled approach to serving, and somehow still miss Jesus. What a scary proposition!

As Christians we are called to be members of a local body, we are called to give our times, talents, and treasures to see the Kingdom of God advance to the ends of the earth. We are called to serve, to give, to read our Bibles, pray, worship, and to do a host of other religious things. But, we are not called to let those things have us!

You see, the religious leaders in this passage missed Jesus because they loved all of the good things they got to do, more than they loved God. And, along the way, their love for these things ruined them! They became prideful and arrogant, thinking that they were more religious than other people; that God was more pleased with them; and that He even loved them more than he loved others. Their religious obedience was killing them. Their own goodness was ruining them.

For us today, there is a huge temptation to gain some of our identity from the things we do for God instead of from God, Himself. We go to church and do all the right things, and over time, it is possible for that pride to slip into our hearts. We may even feel like God owes us blessings because we are good people. But, the truth of the matter is that our very best deeds caused Jesus Christ to be crucified. Instead of having pride in our religion, let us boast in the Lord, who has delivered unlikely people like us from our rebellion.

Discussion:

In what ways are you prone to experiencing religious pride?

Why do you think it is so easy for us to slip into justifying ourselves through performance (i.e. trying to earn our acceptance with God)?

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me for ever loving the good things that you have given me more than I have loved you. Forgive me for placing my trust in the things I can do or accomplish. Forgive me if I have ever let pride come into my heart because of religious performance. Forgive me Lord for thinking that I can have hope, peace, joy, and love by doing good things. Lord, I pray you would help me to remember that I can do nothing without you and that my identity is not found in anything other than you! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4:

Today's Verses: **Matthew 2:7, 8**

⁷Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

Devotion: **An Unlikely Revelation**

Herod had a brilliant plan. And, once he has dismissed the religious leaders and called in the Magi, he was going to get rid of this messiah once and for all. His plan was to tell the magi about the prophecy from Micah 5:2, and have them do his dirty work for him. He was going to have them go to Bethlehem, find the child, and then report back to him on the location.

But, this is not all that unlikely. Herod was known for doing things like this, and sadly, killing a child would rank pretty low on his list of evil actions. But, what is unlikely is that God used the mouth of Herod, to reveal the location of the messiah to these wise men! As we mentioned in day 1, these men had done everything they knew to do in their natural wisdom. They had studied, they had observed the stars, and their best efforts had gotten them to Jerusalem. Now, they were given the precise location, not from Herod, but from the Word of God that He was quoting from.

This teaches us that we cannot find Jesus without a little help from God. We cannot turn to Him through our own natural abilities and efforts. And even though God uses unlikely situations to get us to His Word, His Word always points us back to Jesus Christ, who is the author and perfecter of our faith. We need an unlikely revelation.

Discussion:

How did God reveal Himself to you when you were saved?

How is God revealing more of Himself to you today?

Prayer:

Lord, I know that my natural abilities will only get me so far and that I am in need of a revelation. I am in need for you to reveal more of you to me so that I can love you more! I know I cannot love you on my own, but I also confess that if you would show me more of you, then I am convinced I would be able to love you more fully in the beauty of that revelation. Lord, all I want is to see a better and clearer picture of you; To see and experience your presence more fully. Lord, would you reveal yourself to me in new and exciting ways today? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 5:

Today's Verse: **Matthew 2:11a**

¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him...

Devotion: **An Unlikely Hope, Peace and Joy**

The wise men had been prepared to meet a future king when they entered Jesus' house, but they had not been prepared to meet the king of the universe. But, something incredible happened when they entered into the house. They saw the God over all creation crawling around on the floor, being held by his mother, and they were struck with the wonder and sheer magnitude of God's amazing plan.

God was not sending a military ruler that would be praised; that would conquer the Romans; that would literally rule on the throne of David in Jerusalem. No, God was sending His Son to put an end to human suffering, pain, and sin. And I wonder if the wise men even stopped to consider how unlikely it was that they were there. That out of all of the people God could have invited, He chose to invite them! On that day, God announced to the world that His Gospel was for ALL people. That He was going to be revealing Himself and the truth of His Word to the nations, beginning with these wise men.

And as the story concludes, one of the most beautiful endings in all of human history emerges. For, it is the outsiders who are brought in to the inside, so that they can see and experience God. It was the unlikely ones are the ones who got to experience His love! It was the wise men who found hope in this newborn king; peace that His reign was coming; and joy that they got to be a part of it.

Discussion:

How have you found hope, peace and joy this season?

Hope

Peace

Joy

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for bringing hope, peace, and joy into my life. Lord, let me always remember that these are gifts from you, not things that I can earn on my own. Let me also remember that these are things that I can only find in Christ, who is my perfect hope, perfect peace, and perfect joy. Lord, also help me when I am not feeling all that hopeful, peaceful, or joyful. Help me to remember that these are gifts that you give, and that you will meet my needs in these areas as long as I will continue to turn to you. I love you Lord, Amen.

Day 6:

Today's Verses: **Matthew 2:11b, 12**

Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

Devotion: **An Unlikely LOVE**

The birth narratives, and this devotional come to a close in these verses. Here, the wise men had fallen down and worshipped Jesus as king and because of their love for Him they had generously given him the gifts that they brought with them. These were not only costly gifts, but they were gifts that foretold of the plan that God had for King Jesus.

You see, the gift of gold was a likely gift for a king, which Jesus most certainly was. But frankincense and myrrh were not all that likely. Why? Because frankincense was a religious oil that was used in sacrificing animals, while myrrh was an preserving oil used in burials. But, when you consider that Jesus was not only a king, but the lamb that would be sacrificed for his people, and then buried for three days in a brand new tomb, then these two gifts take on a new and exciting meaning.

Today, God is not only calling us to bring our gifts, talents, time, and treasure to Jesus, but He is also asking us to stop and consider His greatest gift to us. Because God so loved the world, He gave us His

only Son, so that whosoever will believe in Him, will have everlasting life. Because God so loved the world He gave us a king. Because God so loved the world He sent us a sacrifice. And, because God so loved the world His Son was murdered, placed into a grave, and risen from the dead on the third day. He went where we should have went so that He could take us to the place we could have never deserved to go. He went down into the death we deserved to give us the heaven of knowing God that we could not earn. That is the unlikely gift that God has given us. That is the unlikely love we are allowed to experience because of Christ.

Discussion:

What are some of the fresh stories that you have had this Christmas season from experiencing God's unlikely love?

What are some of the gifts (time, talents, and treasures) that you are excited to give back to God in 2016?

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this Unlikely Advent series and thank you for using it in my life to teach me that hope, peace, joy, and love all come from you. Thank you also for showing me that you give those things to me so that I can reach others and show them what hope, peace, joy, and love look like in Christ. Lord, help me to experience your love more fully than I ever have, so that all the people around me may begin experiencing that same love too. Lord I love you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*“Three things will last forever – faith, hope, and love
– and the greatest of these is love”
– 1 Corinthians 13:13*



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