



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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Tyndale House Publishers,  
Carol Stream, IL, 2013.

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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 2:*

## **An Unlikely Peace**

"God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." - C.S. Lewis

"Lord, you will grant us peace; all we have accomplished is really from you." – Isaiah 26:12

# Day 1:

## *Today's Verses:* **Isaiah 7:14**

<sup>14</sup>All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel, which means God is with us.

## *Devotion:* **An Unlikely Arrival**

### *Setting the Scene*

As Mary rode alone through the hill country of Judea, she must have thought back about that day. She would have remembered it as if it were yesterday. The day that the angel had come to her, delivering the most unlikely message that she had ever heard. He had told her that she was going to have a son! And for all of the joy that this might normally bring, she remembered being desperately afraid.

As she slowly made her way past Jerusalem, she might have recalled how difficult it had been for her to sleep that night. Her body had been physically anxious from the adrenaline that was surging through her veins, but all she could do was lie there; wondering, how she was going to break this news to her family? To her fiancé, Joseph? Her mind had raced that night, as she fought for sleep for hours. Sadly, it never came.

She had probably made this trip before, but never with such a heavy heart. Oh, how she longed to be back there with Elizabeth and her newborn child. But she knew it was right for her to return. And, as she put miles between her and Elizabeth, her thoughts again drifted to that lonely morning. She remembered hearing the roosters scratching about before the sun came up. She knew then that it would not be long before her family was awake. So after getting out of bed, and thinking about what she was going to say to her father, she probably remembered praying that the Lord would be with her.

As she continued to ride, she noticed the mountains in the distance, which meant she was about halfway home. She had been gone for three months now, and while she missed everyone, it had been nice feeling accepted and understood by Elizabeth. It was comforting the way they laughed and spoke for hours about their sons. Now, she imagined facing a family who may completely disown her; a fiancé who would not want to marry her; and a community that would shame her and want to stone her. But, she tried putting these thoughts away for the moment; they just made her even more depressed.

Her mind drifted again back to that morning. She recalled how she had gotten her father's attention, before he went out into the fields for the day. She pictured the way he had smiled at her and said: "What is it, my child?", as she prepared to tell him. But, no sooner than she had opened her mouth, did the words run back into her lungs, refusing to come out. She had panicked, and he could see it all over her face.

She laughed a little to herself as she recalled the rest of that morning. There she was, standing silently and awkwardly in front of her father, who was patiently waiting for something to come out of her mouth. Just then, her thoughts shifted to Elizabeth. "She is pregnant" Mary thought to herself. Why, if there is anyone in the world who will understand what I am going through, then it would be her", she imagined. So, instead of telling her father that she was pregnant that morning, and instead of trying to explain the angel's message, Mary had asked permission to go and see her cousin. Now, three months later, she knew it was time for her to head home and tell everyone what was going on inside of her. What an unlikely arrival this was going to be!

## *An Unlikely Arrival*

I wonder what Mary was thinking as she made that trip back from Elizabeth's. The Bible does not tell us exactly, but I imagine she was pretty scared. She had no idea how her family or Joseph was going to react to this news. She had no promise of what her future was going to look like. She must have been terrified.

I imagine that she planned to arrive near nightfall, so that she could get inside the city gate without too many people noticing her. Maybe she had the courage to go straight home and tell her family while they were all gathering together before bed. Maybe she excused herself and promised to catch up with everyone in the morning. Maybe as she lie alone that night, the frightened little girl inside of her longer for her mother's comfort. However all of this played out, the most unlikely arrival was about to occur. For everyone would soon know that she did not come alone back to Nazareth. She was carrying a son.



*Discussion:*

What are some of the things that you have been trying to avoid?

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Why does the prospect of facing \_\_\_\_\_ make you fearful, anxious, or even upset?

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What was it about Mary's relationship with God that gave her strength?

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*Prayer:*

Lord, I cannot imagine exactly what Mary was feeling, but I do know how it feels to face my biggest fears. Everything in me wants to avoid it; to turn and run away! But, Lord, I believe that you can give us the courage to face our fears. I believe that you give us the most unlikely circumstances to teach us that you are enough, and that you are powerful enough to get us through the most difficult circumstances. Lord, help me to really believe this and to trust that you have everything under control. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Day 2:

## *Today's Verses:* **Matthew 1:18**

<sup>18</sup>This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## *Devotion:* **An Unlikely Engagement**

### *Setting the Scene*

It is possible that Joseph heard the news of Mary's late night arrival from the night shift gatekeeper, the one who had let her in. He may have also told Joseph that she seemed a bit flustered, but that would only make sense, given that she was probably tired from a long journey. Either way, he was excited to finally see her. This had been the longest that they had ever been apart, and now he was ready to see her pretty face.

In the meantime, he tried to keep himself busy around the shop. He had a few last minute projects to complete before she arrived, so that he could give her his undivided attention. He imagined all of the stories that she was going to tell him, in vivid detail, as she would recount her time with Elizabeth. But, what he was most excited to hear about, was an update on the miracle birth that everyone was talking about. The Lord had really blessed her cousin to get pregnant at such a late age, he thought. The irony could not be thicker.

Yet, that thought was violently interrupted, as his door flew wide open, almost breaking it in two. Instead of seeing Mary, he was looking right into the eyes of her screaming father. This was all happening so fast. He had no idea what to make of it, as her father's words just kept coming and coming like a pack of angry lions.

After a few moments, his brain finally caught up with the intensity of the moment, as he began piecing together the unlikely story that her father was telling. And, in a moment, his heart came crashing down on top of him. His world fell like a house of cards. He wanted desperately to defend himself, but he was too broken to speak. Mary was pregnant! How could this all be happening?

Then, just before leaving, her father probably looked right at Joseph and said: "we trusted you! You were supposed to protect her honor, not defile and condemn her!" Then just as quickly as he had come he was gone, slamming the door behind him. Joseph was left alone and bewildered, wondering what to make of this.

## *An Unlikely Engagement*

While it is impossible to know how these conversations really went, it is obvious that there would have been tension between these two men. Mary's dad would have assumed Joseph was the child's father. He would have been hurt and wondering if he had made the right decision when choosing this man for his daughter. Joseph would have felt like he was being attacked on every side. He could have been bewildered and confused, with no one to believe him. It just didn't seem fair.

If I were Joseph, it would have been easy to close my shop for the day, and sit alone in my room; dreaming about what life would be like if none of this were happening. It may have even been easy, at times like this, to imagine what life would have looked like, had the Romans never conquered his people. You see Joseph was a descendant of the great king David. And, if things were different, he would have been in line to be the king of Israel. He would have been living far away from the mess he found himself in, inside a regal palace in Jerusalem or Bethlehem. He would have all of the money and power that a person could imagine. Foreign kings and dignitaries would have brought him their daughters and would have groveled over the promise of a marriage to him.

Yet, on this day, Joseph likely sat in the only palace he would ever know, which was a dusty old carpentry shop. He sat powerless and confused, with little money to his name. No kings were darkening his door, only an angry father-in-law who did not know the full story. Frankly neither did he! But, perhaps, the most crushing reality that Joseph was left to deal with was the fact that he was now engaged to a teenage girl, who was pregnant by another man! His story was nothing like he would have imagined it.

## *Discussion:*

How is your life different than you would have imagined it ten years ago?

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What have been some of the struggles that have brought you to where you are now?

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Where can you see God's hand at work in your circumstances?

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## *Prayer:*

Lord, I may not have been in line to be a king, but I know what it feels like to have my expectations crushed. My life looks totally different than how I would have imagined it, and sometimes I am just trying to keep my head above water. I know that you are with me, but would you show me how the things I am going through are under your care and control? Will you help me with my expectations, not to get disappointed when things do not go my way? Will you help me to be patient, as I wait to see you come through for me? Help me in the midst of these unlikely circumstances. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Day 3:

## *Today's Verses:* **Matthew 1:19**

<sup>19</sup> Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

## *Devotion:* **An Unlikely Decision**

### *Setting the Scene*

Later that night, Joseph was left alone; alone with his thoughts and alone with his pain. His heart was not only breaking, but it was searching for an answer as to why Mary would betray him like this. Had he done or said something to her that could have caused this? Had she become pregnant before she left? He shuddered thinking about it.

His thoughts may have then turned to the moment that he and Mary had said their goodbyes, just moments before she left to see Elizabeth. Perhaps he remembered what it felt like to kiss her lips or hold her next to him. But, now, he was probably wondering if he was the only man that kissed or held her that day.

Maybe, as he was considering the days and weeks that led up to her departure, he remembered how much time they had spent together, going over various ideas about what their home was going to look like. Although she was young, she knew exactly what she wanted in a house, and had given Joseph specific instructions on the things she needed him to be working on while she was gone. And as he thought about this, he just could not imagine her being unfaithful before she left. It just didn't seem likely!

Then, maybe he considered that this was something that happened while she gone. He had not been there with her, and there were plenty of opportunities for something like this to have happened. But, this just did not seem like something Mary would have done either! And as he lay down in his bed, Joseph lacked the answers to the questions his heart was asking.

## *An Unlikely Decision*

While Joseph was confused about many things, the one thing that he knew for sure was that he truly loved Mary. And, while that DID NOT mean he still was still going to marry her, after what she had done, it did mean that he wanted the best for her and did not want to hurt her. He had seen too many men publically and shamefully embarrassing their fiancés and spouses for things just like this. And, frankly, that was the last thing that he wanted to have happen to her.

So, Joseph began thinking about what he was going to do. On the one hand, he knew that he could marry her anyway, raise the child as if it were his own, and allow everyone to think that he had gotten her pregnant. But, he knew that meant taking on her shame, losing his honored place in the town, and maybe even losing his business, since no one would want to hire him after this. Or, he considered what it might look like if he divorced her, and put her away privately. In this, he would allow her father and mother to explain where the baby had come from, and he would be vindicated.

Clearly, Joseph did not like any of the decisions that were in front of him. He had done nothing wrong, and now he had to make one of the hardest and most unlikely decisions of his life. Nothing was making any sense. But, after much thought, he finally made the decision to privately divorce her, so that he could begin picking up the pieces of his broken life.

*Discussion:*

When things go terribly wrong, what are some of the dreams that you still look back upon?

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How would you respond, if someone believed something untrue about you?

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If you were in Joseph's shoes, what would you be thinking?

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*Prayer:*

Lord, I can imagine how Joseph would have felt, because I know what it feels like to be betrayed, accused, and rejected. These have been powerful emotions in my story, and they are tied to key events that have made me into who I am. But, even as I say that, I cannot imagine how Jesus was betrayed, accused, and rejected by his closest and dearest friends. He was completely innocent. He did not deserve it! And yet, he endured it all for me. And, because Jesus did that for me, I know that I need to offer that same unlikely love to others. But it is hard. Everything in me wants to run away when I am feeling rejected. God, will you help me to be more like Jesus in this area? Will you teach me how to live this way? In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Day 4:

## *Today's Verses:* **Matthew 1:20-25a**

<sup>20</sup> "As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born."

## *Devotion:* **An Unlikely Message**

### *Setting the Scene*

As Joseph lie alone in his bed, his heart must have been reeling over the things that had just happened. His pulse was likely racing. His eyes were more than a little wet with tears that no one would ever see. He was alone now. And, as he drifted into sleep, he could already feel the dread of tomorrow closing in around him. How was he going to break this news to Mary? To her family? That he was really going to divorce her? Just then, his body settled limply down into the bed, numb from exhaustion, as he gave up the fight, at least for one night. He was so alone.

Then, somewhere in between awake and sleeping, a light crashed upon his consciousness, and a voice came speaking the most unlikely message that he had ever heard. With eyes still closed, and with pictures washing over his sleeping brain, he thought he heard an angel calling out his name, "Joseph, son of David". Unsure of his surroundings and foggy from his slumber, he thought he heard the angel telling him "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins".

As his body jolted back into reality, and as his oxygen starved lungs gasped for air, he began to realize that this encounter had only been a dream. But, Joseph also knew that this was no ordinary dream! For, the Lord's angel had just visited him, and had given him the most unlikely message! He now knew exactly what he had do.



## *An Unlikely Message*

It is unlikely that Joseph would have rolled back over and went to sleep after a dream like this. I imagine that he jumped out of bed and began hastily trying to find whatever robe he could get his hands on. Then, after bursting through his own front door, I can picture him sprinting down the street, his robes in disarray, and one sandal still unlatched. Once he arrived at Mary's Father's house, it is likely that he even began banging on her door, in the middle of the night, hoping to get inside so that could tell everyone this unlikely message!

Once inside their home, and with everyone wiping their itchy sleepy eyes, Joseph probably began to recount the most unlikely message that any of them had ever heard! He told them about his plans to divorce Mary, about his dream, and the angel's message that changed his mind; he told them about all of it! And, while everyone in that room was trying to wrap their minds around everything that was happening, I imagine Mary speaking up and confirming everything that Joseph was saying.

After a brief silence, everyone must have thought to look over at her father. What was he thinking they all wondered? What would he say? Did he buy the story that Mary had just given? Was he believing the dream that Joseph was describing? The energy in the room was at a fever pitch, even as the silence was surely deafening. Then, as her father finally spoke, I wonder if his face softened, as he began quoting from the prophet Isaiah, saying: "Behold, The virgin will conceive and bear a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means God is with us"

Whatever happened on that night, and however it all played out, it must have been incredible. There is so much that we simply do not know. But, what we know for sure is that Mary's father gave Joseph permission to marry his daughter. And, after they grabbed a few of her belongings, Joseph may have taken her home that very night; to be his wife. More importantly, however, was that God's unlikely message was about to change the entire course of human history. These men and women had a front row seat!

## *Discussion:*

What kinds of things does God use in your life to get your attention?

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What are some of fresh stories you have from seeing God move powerfully in your life?

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What is something your currently doing, that God might be calling you to change your mind about?

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## *Prayer:*

Lord, I confess that it hard for me to wait on your timing. I dislike going through pain, but it is even harder for me when I do not see an end in sight. I know that you have everything in control, but I often wish you would let me in on what is happening. Perhaps, I am still struggling with control, and having trouble completely trusting you. Lord would you teach me how to let go? Would you show me that it is ok to experience pain, even while I am waiting on you? Also, would you help me to see how my unlikely circumstances are preparing me for the unlikely ways in which you are wanting to use me? In Jesus' name, Amen.

# Day 5:

## *Today's Verses:* **Luke 2:1-3**

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

## *Devotion:* **An Unlikely Paradox**

### *Setting the Scene*

After breakfast, Joseph decided to begin working on some of his latest jobs. It had been a few weeks since he had taken Mary home to be his wife and now he needed to make some money. While he was busy working, his new bride began working on a few things around the house, as she made preparations for the coming baby. This was certainly an unlikely arrangement. Yet, while things were far from perfect, with the Lord's help, Mary and Joseph were making it work.

Just then, it is likely that both of them would have heard the commotion that was going on outside. As the protector of his newly formed family, Joseph would have left his shop and went immediately outside in order to ascertain the situation. What he saw would completely change their lives forever.

Upon the horizon, was a group of Roman messengers, which usually meant the worst. When they had approached the city square, the most important looking one among them, announced that everyone needed to come out of their homes and listen to his message. Joseph did not need to go in and get Mary; she was already coming out after hearing it for herself. Then, as the crowds squeezed in, they stood together and listened as the man began to speak.

"Citizens of Nazareth", the burly Roman growled. "The great Caesar Augustus has decreed that all of the world must immediately report to the towns of their ancestral birth", which was a clever way of saying that Rome wanted more taxes from these impoverished people. For Joseph, it meant uprooting his pregnant wife, and having her once again travel down the road, heading south toward Jerusalem.

Before riding away, the messenger finished his announcement, saying: "long live Caesar Augustus, 'savior of the world, and son of the gods'", which were titles Augustus found acceptable, and a title that this messenger loved antagonizing faithful Jews with. And, while those blasphemous words were left lingering in the air, the Roman turned and rode away; heading to the next town to share the same message.

## *An Unlikely Paradox*

Joseph was obviously concerned. He knew that they could not stay in Nazareth, since the tax collectors would likely turn them over to the Romans if they failed to obey the edict. Yet, he also knew that they shouldn't be traveling this far along in Mary's pregnancy! But, what choice did they have? They could either face the dangerous eighty miles of mountainous road, or defy the most powerful empire the world had ever known. While both seemed impossible, one, at least, seemed like they might be able to survive.

And just like that, Joseph and Mary were packing whatever things they could reasonably take with them, which would all have to fit on the back of their little pack mule. Joseph made sure to pack his tools, so that he could find work and make some money while they were gone. While he was doing that, Mary would have packed the dried breads, oil, and a few spices that they might eat along the way. By the morning, they would leave their bed for the last time, and head on their latest and most paradoxical adventure.

Yet, the greatest paradox of all, was that which was growing inside of Mary. For, against the backdrop of Rome, led by Caesar Augustus, who was known as the savior of the world, came a tiny little Jewish king, who would be the true savior of the world. In the looming shadow of the most powerful man in the world, known affectionately as the son of the gods, would come a despised Jewish peasant, who was literally the Son of the Living God! What an unlikely paradox!

*Discussion:*

What is it about discomfort that you dislike the most?

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Why do you think the Lord uses uncomfortable circumstances to grow us?

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Do you know someone who is currently going through uncomfortable circumstances? How might the Lord use you to encourage them this season?

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*Prayer:*

Lord, when you saved me, you called me out of the most unlikely scenarios and circumstances. Yet, you also have taken me into some of the most unlikely places that I have ever been. I know you have promised to work all things in my life for good, so I am choosing to believe that something good can come out of my discomfort. Lord, I also need your eyes this holiday season. Tons of people are suffering and needing to be encouraged. Jesus, I want to help. So, use me to minister to someone who needs to feel the peace that your son Jesus brings! Reveal that person to me, and equip me to serve them Jesus. In your name, Amen.

# Day 6:

## *Today's Verses:* **Luke 2:4-5**

<sup>4</sup>And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>5</sup>He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.

## *Devotion:* **An Unlikely PEACE!**

While Joseph occupies just a few short verses in the Biblical story, he was a man who had great peace. He had peace after the angel's message, peace when taking Mary to be his wife, and now peace in the midst of the most impossible circumstances! And, while the Bible tells us that Mary found favor in the eyes of God, it should also be clear why God chose Joseph to raise His Son. There was no higher honor possible, and God chose this man for a reason and gave him the peace to accomplish the job.

Joseph's peace did not stem from the things around him, but from the God who was living in him. He had a simple faith that God would keep His promises, and would do everything He said He would do. And that brought Joseph peace! Because of his simple faith, he was given the unique privilege of raising God's one and only Son.

Just think, Joseph was the one who got to hold Jesus when he tripped and scuffed his knee. He was the one who likely taught Him about God's Word and had him memorizing Scripture. He was the one who invited the Lord of all creation to bounce upon his lap and roll helplessly on the floor in laughter during games. He taught Jesus how to be a man, even showing him the art of carpentry so that he could provide for his mother when he passed away. This man Joseph got to see God do amazing things, all because he had a very simple faith. What could you see God do, if you just had a very simple faith?

This advent, our hope for you is that you would have that unlikely kind of peace!

## *Discussion:*

Do you believe that God will give you the peace you need to accomplish what He has for you?

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How could God use a simple faith in you to accomplish everything He has for you?

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How could God use your simple faith, to bless the ones around you?

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## *Prayer:*

Lord, I need an unlikely kind of peace today. I need a peace that defies my circumstances and stems from the God who is living deep inside of me! I want to see you do incredible things in and through me! So, God, would you give me that kind of unlikely peace? Would you help me to have a simple faith? And would you open doors for me to see you working in my life? In Jesus' wonderful name! Amen.





*“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace  
at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you  
all.”*

*- 1 Thessalonians 3:16*

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 purple and one 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*