



AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Copyright © 2025 by The Foundry Publishing
The Foundry Publishing®
PO Box 419527
Kansas City, MO 64141
thefoundrypublishing.com

978-0-8341-4328-9

Printed in the
United States of America

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*A note on spellings: To respect context and culture, British spellings of the author have been preserved within devotional texts. Scripture quotations adhere to U.S. American spellings in accordance with the NIV.

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introduction

Advent is one of the great seasons of the Christian calendar. It is a season when we can look at the brokenness and fallenness of the world around us yet testify boldly and confidently, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). As we prepare to celebrate the first Advent—the first coming of Christ to this world—we also look forward to his second and final Advent, when he will come in glory to make all things once again good and very good.

Over these next weeks, we will journey together through the four great Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. This year, that’s November 30. As we consider and meditate on these themes of Advent, we join in celebration with the universal church for these next four Sundays. There is something deeply significant about a local faith community spending intentional time together in the same scriptures for a season. There is something even more significant about a family of local churches across a district, a region, or even the globe journeying through this season intentionally together.

Thank you for being part of this adventure. Just as he did at Bethlehem, may Christ—the very hope of all the earth—come to each of us and all of us in a way that changes everything.

—REV. DAVID GILMOUR
BRITISH ISLES



***First Sunday
of Advent***

hope

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

Scripture

LUKE 2:1–3

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

During the first week of Advent, we celebrate hope—and it's easy for us to see why. Jesus Christ, the hope of all the earth, is born! Jesus is the ultimate expression of the love of God, undeniable proof that we matter, that we're precious, that we're important enough for God to become flesh and move into our neighbourhood.

The incarnation is a message of hope directly from God to humanity. God fully embraced our fallenness and fragility, our brokenness and messiness, all so we could be rescued. This is a message of incredible hope! Yet it came at a time that seemed utterly, tragically hopeless. In fact, Luke takes great care to emphasise the hopelessness of the situation. “In those days,” he writes. *Those days*, when God's people were once again living in captivity and bondage. *Those days*, when worship of the one true God was openly mocked by the faith systems of imperial Rome. *Those days*, when the fate of Abraham's children was decided by emperors and governors and kings who cared nothing for Yahweh or his people.

Those days had precious little hope, and it only seemed to be getting worse. The census ordered by Caesar Augustus served a number of purposes, none of which would have inspired hope for the Jewish people. It meant more efficient taxes, which would pay for more efficient oppression. The census was a demonstration of Caesar's power: a single command issued in Rome had repercussions that reached around the known world. And it was a reminder that no one could ever hope to challenge imperial authority.

Yet it was in *those days* that hope entered the world. It was in *those days* that the definitive basis for all hope stepped in and began the revolu-

tion. And it was in *those days* that God assured his people that he wasn't finished, it wasn't over—in fact, it was only just beginning.

Many of us find ourselves living in *those days*. It may not be imperial oppression or the dismantling of the faith community—though, for many of our sisters and brothers in Christ around the world, it is exactly those things. For others of us, *those days* may be days of sickness, of marital trouble, of financial hardship, or so much more. It's essential that we not compare our suffering with that of others because, whatever *those days* look like, they can be painful, crippling, even devastating. *Those days* can take a thousand different forms, but what they all have in common is that they seem to exclude the possibility of hope. Yet we will find, as did the people of God more than two millennia ago, that God does some of his best work in the most hopeless of situations.

So we can have a sure and certain hope that it's not over for us. God is not finished in our situations or our circumstances. He's not through in his work in us and for us. However oppressive *those days* may seem, our God is greater. *Those days* do not eliminate our hope. Instead, they create the perfect conditions for us to lean into the hope of God's promise to one day heal, redeem, and restore all creation.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

What hopeless days in your own life might be called “those days”?

When you've experienced despair and hardship in your life, what things—large or small—happened in the midst of that time to bring you hope?

What brings you hope today?

Prayer

Write a prayer of hope.

MONDAY - DECEMBER 1, 2025

Whose Mother Was . . .

Scripture

MATTHEW 1:1, 3, 5-6

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: . . . Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram . . . Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

One of the many things that distinguishes the Bible from other ancient literature and mythology is that it never attempts to present its heroes without their flaws. The greatest champions of the faith so often made such a dreadful mess of it all. They doubted and denied, betrayed and abused, lied and cheated. The Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 could just as accurately be called a Rogues Gallery. Yet the Bible makes no attempt to cover up the stains or sugarcoat reality. On the contrary, it shines a light on the parts we would tend to leave in shadows, bringing into sharp focus these fragile heroes with their feet of clay as a celebration of God's gracious ability to bring beauty out of dust and hope out of ashes.

The genealogy of Christ is the same. Surely, we would assume, if an exception could be made, it would be here! Surely this is where Matthew the evangelist could skip over some of the sordid details—not lie, just *omit* some of the more scandalous parts of Christ’s lineage. Alexander the Great claimed the demigod Hercules as one of his ancestors; Julius Caesar insisted that his family was descended from the goddess Venus. Ancient heroes and rulers emphasised the greatness and grandeur of their family trees. They shone light on the glory of their bloodlines. Here, Matthew is introducing the King of all kings and Lord of all lords—it’s the perfect place for him to do some pruning on the family tree! Instead, he puts special emphasis not on the heroes but on the scandals. He shines his spotlight on the parts of the tree we would seek to cover up.

Tamar—the victim of family politics and the predatory sexual instincts of her father-in-law— is included in the genealogy of Christ. This woman, who was abused and betrayed and left to fend for herself in an unfriendly world—something that culture in that time period would’ve considered a source of shame for her—is highlighted and elevated to a place of beauty and emphasis as one of the links in the chain that brought the Saviour into the world.

Rahab and Ruth are both recorded. Rahab was a prostitute—not acceptable in the eyes of the people of God, yet she was revered because she once helped the Israelites escape from a hostile military situation. Afterward, they took her in and allowed her to live among them as one of them. Ruth was a foreigner too—and not just any foreigner but one of the worst kinds: a Moabite. The Israelites had laws against comingling with foreigners, yet God also expected them to make exceptions from time to time, and Ruth was one such exception. She was an outsider brought into the community of God’s people to become one of them.

Uriah’s wife—better known to us today as Bathsheba—also makes the genealogy list. Bathsheba was another victim of a powerful man. King David’s refusal to control his lust led to a series of events that eventually saw him betray one of his own subjects, having him killed. This culture in this time period would consider David’s acts to be a source of shame for his victim. Yet here Bathsheba ascends to a place of honour in this genealogical record of how hope came to save the world.

There are seasons when we find ourselves in messes we have either inherited or made. It can be difficult to find hope, to believe that things will ever improve, that light could ever dawn in this place of darkness.

But the genealogy of Jesus is a clear message to the people of God about the way God brings hope out of ashes and light out of darkness. We can sometimes be tempted to think that redemption is just something that happens to some deep-down, hidden-away part of us that will one day fly away to glory. But our God is making all things new, and he's doing it right now. He's redeeming every inch and corner of creation. So, whether we have brought this disaster on ourselves, or it's been inflicted on us by others, he is more than willing and more than able to redeem it and bring hope out of even this. Just ask Tamar or Bathsheba or Rahab or Ruth.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

What do you think about the claim that the Bible never attempts to present its heroes without their flaws?

How does the inclusion of "messy" in the genealogy of Jesus offer us hope today?

Prayer

Write a prayer about the messy situation in your life that you need Jesus to redeem.
