5 Words of Advent Wonder

Introduction

Quote from Trevor

"After almost forty years in pastoral ministry, I have noticed a few things about how people experience Christmas. On one hand, they yearn to celebrate the mystery of the season in a way that is meaningful, significant, and even transformative. On the other hand, they reach Christmas Day feeling unprepared and unready. Shopping, finalizing holiday plans to visit friends and family, and decorating their homes gobble up the days preceding Christmas and fill them with anxiety. Christmas Day arrives, and they have not observed Advent the way they intended. Consequently, their celebration of the Christ child on Christmas Day lacks a sense of wonder."

Wonder and Awe

Wonder: a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable.

Awe: a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder

3 examples of Wonder:

- Girl in the elevator
- Boy seeing Christmas lights
- Drone

Advent is a season of wonder. We wonder at the miracle of the creator of the universe coming down in the form of human flesh, born a baby.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

[10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for **behold**, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10

The word behold is used several times throughout the bible and it means: "to **pay close attention**, **fix your eyes**, or **suddenly notice** something significant, often God's powerful, new, or transformative action, urging readers to pause from distractions and witness divine truth, judgment, or restoration"

Every year at this time, God urges us to behold, to pay close attention. To wonder with awe. May we never lose the sense of wonder on Christmas Day. Let us embrace the rhythm of Advent to help us to arrange our lives to encounter Jesus throughout this month.

A great way to do this is by using an Advent Wreath. There are 5 candles that are part of observing Advent with the Advent Wreath. These 5 candles give us 5 words to treasure and meditate on the coming of Jesus.

Each of these candles represents a word. Each of these 5 words represent deep longings of the human heart. If you did a random sampling of people, most likely these 5 words would spring to the top of the list.

First Candle (Prophesy): Hope

The first Advent Candle is known as the prophesy candle. This candle reminds us of the prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. Isaiah 9:2

This first candle represents hope. We no longer have to walk in darkness. There is hope!

Treasure and Meditate

The definition of hope is: a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.

Another word for hope is longing. What are those things we long to have happen? When we say we have hope as Christians, what do we mean?

> "Our Christian hope is that we are going to live with Christ in a new earth, where there is not only no more death, but where life is what it was always meant to be." Tim Keller

> "The best we can hope for in this life is a knothole peek at the shining realities ahead. Yet a glimpse is enough. It's enough to convince our hearts that whatever sufferings and sorrow currently assail us aren't worthy of comparison to that which waits over the horizon." Joni Erickson Tada

Take a moment and let these verses speak to the hope we have as followers of Jesus:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

11 Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God! Psalms 42:11

The famous Christmas hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" states it well:

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Enemy of hope: Misplaced hope

The enemy would like nothing more than to discourage and distract us and entice us into placing our hope in something other than Jesus. This psalm spells it out well:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright Psalms 20:7-8

It is very tempting to put our hope in success, power, wealth, significance, health, good relationships, and even doing good things. We might even put a lot of hope in creating the perfect Christmas with our families!

Reflection

What are the chariots and horses in your life that you can tend to place your hope in?

What are you hoping for? Where do you place your hope?

Practice

Spend a few moments in silence using this breath prayer:

Breath in: Lord Jesus

Breath out: My hope is in you

Throughout the week, let the word HOPE settle into your soul. Jesus came to give you hope.

Second Candle (Bethlehem): Peace

The second Advent candle reminds us of Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem before Mary gave birth to Jesus.

May the LORD bless his people with peace! Psalms 29:11

This candle represents peace. It reminds us that we can experience a peace that surpasses all understanding. It is beyond what we can imagine. It is a peace that guards our hearts and minds (Phil 4:7).

Treasure and Meditate

Advent reminds us of Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem before Mary gave birth to Jesus. Building on the meaning of the Prophecy Candle, this second candle recalls that after all of the division, destruction, and dispersion of the kingdom in the Old Testament, there might finally be peace on Earth – Jesus is coming, and so is his Kingdom of Peace.

St. Seraphim of Sarov – "Acquire inner peace, and thousands around you will be saved."

Father Jacques Philippe in the book "Searching for and Maintaining Peace," suggests that the soul can be likened to a lake. When a lake is serene and still, it has a greater capacity to reflect the beauty of the light that shines into it, and thus permits the light to more clearly and beautifully reflect the surroundings that might encircle the lake. So it is with our souls.

The more at peace or still they are, the more of God's light and grace is permitted to reflect and radiate from them. Yet, the more agitated they are, like a lake with wind-tossed waves, the less and less light is permitted to reflect beauty.

Take a moment and let these verses speak to the peace we have as followers of Jesus:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon[d] his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Isaiah 26:3

7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

The famous Christmas hymn "Silent Night" ends with this inviting phrase:

"Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace."

Enemy of peace: Distraction and Busyness

Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength. But you would have none of it. Isaiah 30:15

We live in a 24-7 world that runs at a frantic pace and we are constantly bombarded with distractions. Richard Foster characterizes the enemy of our time in this way:

"In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in "muchness" and "manyness," he will rest satisfied."

Sometimes the busyness and distraction can be a way of coping with the strains and stresses of life. But these ways of coping never deliver the peace we are looking for.

You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard describes the peace we are looking for in this way: "Shalom means *fullness of life*. Peace is a rest of will that comes from divine assurance about how things will turn out."

Reflection

What does the lake of your soul look like? What are the things in your life that stir up the waters of your lake?

What do you need to let go of to keep your mind focused on the Prince of Peace?

Practice

Spend a few moments in silence using this breath prayer:

Breath in: Jesus, your are the Prince of Peace

Breath out: I receive your peace.

Throughout the week, let the word PEACE settle into your soul. We can experience fullness of life as we eliminate the distractions and center our hearts and minds on the true Prince of Peace.

Third Candle (Shepherd): Joy

The third candle of Advent symbolizes **Joy**. As we continue to approach Christmas Day, our joy grows more and more. The third candle takes us back to the joyful anticipation of the shepherds who journeyed to see Jesus in Bethlehem.

[10] but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. Luke 2:10

Joy is more than happiness, it is a state of being grounded in the recognition we are children of God.

Treasure and Meditate

Webster's Dictionary defines joy in this way: the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires: delight.

We experience joy when our deepest longings are met and when we are fully known, loved, and accepted. All of our deepest longings and desires are satisfied only in the loving relationship God extends to all of us through His Son, Jesus.

C.S Lewis made this interesting statement: "But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is."

According to Lewis, we tend to try to create our happiness by what we do; things that are in our control. But lasting joy is a by-product of what is outside our control or power. Joy comes when we let go of our life and run into the loving arms of our Heavenly Father. We can certainly "choose joy", but then that can become an effort on our own to feel joyful. When we choose to dwell in the presence of God, we experience Joy. Christmas morning brought Joy to the World.

Take a moment and let these verses speak to the peace we have as followers of Jesus:

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalms 16:11

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation;you have increased its joy. Isaiah 9:2-3

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalms 51:12

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy. Psalms 94:19

The famous Christmas hymn "Joy to the World" declares the source of our joy:

"Joy to the world the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King."

Enemy of Joy: Shame

Have you ever struggled with experiencing joy? What are some things that tend to rob you of joy?

Christian psychologist Curt Thomson defines the real enemy of joy is shame. In his book, *The Soul of Shame*, he makes these observations regarding shame:

> *For shame most primitively and powerfully undermines the process of joyful attachment, integration and creativity. Of all the primary tasks of the infant, there is none more crucial than the pursuit, acquisition and establishment of joyful, securely*

attached relationships. When her mother answers irritably, "No! How many times have I told you we can't do that?" there is a certain shearing off of joyful anticipation

The defining relational motif for humankind is not that we need to work as hard as we can, or at least harder than we are. It is not to do our best or …about being right or the acquisition of power. Each of those (and other visions like them) play into the hand of shame's anxiety. No—rather, we were created for joy. Not a weak and watery concept of joy that merely dilutes our sadness and pain. Rather it is the hard deck on which all of life finds its legs, a byproduct of deeply connected relationships in which each member is consummately known."

Christmas is an annual reminder that Jesus came to offer that kind of relationship. Jesus came to pay the price of all that separates us from God. He paid the price for the sins we have committed, for the effect of others sins on us and for the accompanying shame that we experience and have such difficulty breaking free from. Jesus conquered all of that so that you can experience indescribable joy. He restores the joyful, secure attachment with our Heavenly Father.

Reflection

Have you ever struggled with experiencing joy? What are the things in your life that steal your joy?

What is Jesus inviting you to consider in the restoration of joy in your life?

Practice

Spend a few moments in silence using this breath prayer:

Breath in: In your Presence

Breath out: there is fullness of Joy.

Throughout the week, practice the presence on Jesus as you go about each day and His love for you and notice those moments of joy that spring up.

Fourth Candle (Angel): Love

The fourth candle of Advent represents **Love,** the ultimate love of God that He might send His only Son for us. It is called the **"Angel's Candle,"** because it represents the love and good news the angels proclaimed at Jesus' birth.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

This fourth candle of Advent is lit the Sunday before Christmas leading us to eagerly await the new Kingdom of God on earth.

Treasure and Meditate

The Bible is a love story, the greatest love story of all. From the beginning, God created man and woman to experience a loving relationship with Him and from Genesis 3 on through the New Testament we see God continually pursuing mankind in love.

This candle reminds us of the depth of that pursuit. Jesus, Immanuel, is God with us and saves us from our sins. No more separation. Through Jesus, God chooses to dwell in us. God's unconditional love is the ultimate antidote to shame. God calls us beloved, which means greatly loved.

Take a moment and let these verses speak to the peace we have as followers of Jesus:

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. Zephaniah 3:17

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 1 John 4:18

A favorite Christmas hymn of mine is “Love Came Down At Christmas” because it declares the essence of the Gospel its title. One phrase in the hymn takes it even further:

“Love was born at Christmas”

Enemy of Love: Fear

[8] When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. Genesis 3:8

Fear. It has been the experience of humankind from the very beginning. The natural reaction to separation from God is fear. Adam and Eve experienced fear in Genesis 3 and they hid from God, something they had never experienced before their fateful decision in the garden.

Have you noticed now naturally fear can crop up in your life? Fear of failure, fear of what others think, fear of making a mistake, fear of abandonment.

A profound attack of the enemy is to try to convince us that God doesn’t really love us. Have you ever said something like this: I know God loves me, but _____.

How many times throughout the Bible when people are confronted with angels or even Jesus, they are told to “fear not!”

Reflection

What do you fear? Name them and confess them to your loving Heavenly Father.

Henri Nouwen provides a simple practice to help us reflect on God’s love:

“If we could just be, for a few moments each day, fully where we are, we would indeed discover that we are not alone and that the One who is with us wants only one thing: to give us love,”

Reflect on your belovedness as a child of God. There are many scriptures that you can meditate on that tell the truth about you and the love God has for you. Below are just a few:

Zephaniah 3:17; 1 John 3:1; Isaiah 49:15-16; Romans 8:38-39

Practice

Spend a few moments in silence using this breath prayer:

Breath in: I am

Breath out: a beloved child of God.

Throughout the week, practice the presence on Jesus as you go about each day and His love for you and notice those moments of joy that spring up.

Fifth Candle (Christ): Restoration

The Christ Candle represents the light that the Son brought into the world when he was born a little baby, God in the flesh. This was the very light of God, come into the world. It also represents the fulfillment of what we have been anticipating. **Everything will be restored**.

4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Revelation 21:4-5

Jesus ushers in the kingdom filled with hope, peace, joy, and love.

Treasure and Meditate

One of the great qualities of candles is how they give light to a room. There is something calming and peaceful in a candle. As we light the candles of the Advent wreath, we are reminding ourselves that Jesus is the light of the world. The fifth white advent candle that is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve. This is the Christ candle and it sits in the center of the wreath. It is a reminder that Jesus is author of life and that hope, peace, joy, and love can only truly be found in accepting and receiving His light.

Every person who has ever lived has yearned for a life signified in these candles. I can't think of four better words that describe the cry of humankind's hearts throughout all time. Hope, peace, joy, and love....Humankind has tried many alternatives to finding real life. At

Christmas, we are reminded by that baby in a manger that God became flesh and dwelt among us. He lived, died for our sins, and was resurrected from the dead all to invite every person to a loving and eternal relationship that is filled with hope, peace, joy, and love. All we have to do is to receive this gift and learn to walk in the newness of this life.

Take a moment and let these verses speak to the love we have as followers of Jesus:

The Enemy Has Been Destroyed!

No longer are we under the power of the enemy! The Christmas carol "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen", makes this statement of victory over the enemy:

God rest ye merry gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day.
To save us all from Satan's power where we were gone astray
Oh Tidings of Comfort and Joy, Comfort and Joy
Oh Tidings of Comfort and Joy!

What wonderful reminders to us in that carol. We are encouraged to rest with God. We have nothing to fear or to cause us dismay, because we remember all that Christ did for us. Jesus saved us from the power of the enemy. We have been restored. What great news of comfort and joy!

Reflection

What would you like to see restored in your life today? What has God restored in your life? Take a moment to praise and thank Him.

Practice

Spend a few moments in silence using this breath prayer:

Breath in: Restore to me

Breath out: the joy of your salvation.