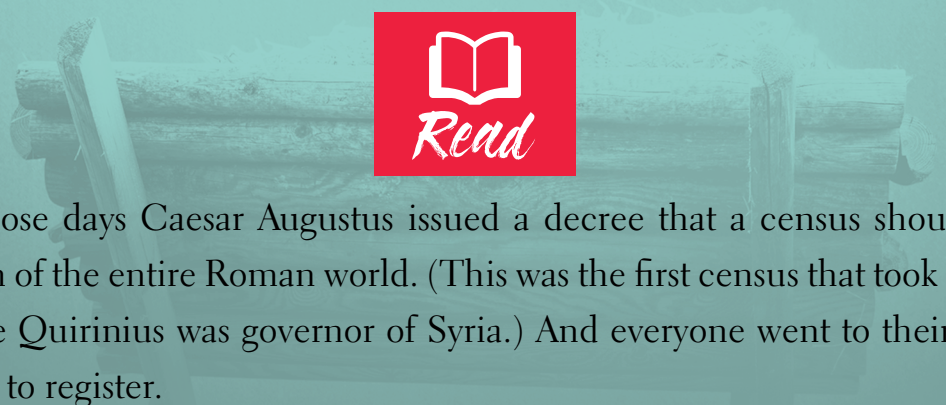
Advent Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

FINDING CHRIST IN OUR WORLD

The fifth and final candle of Advent represents Jesus Christ. This candle signifies the ultimate reason for our Christmas journey—the baby Jesus, God's only Son, the Savior of the world. Jesus is truly the reason for and the meaning of Christmas, and He is the source of all the gifts we've discovered on this Advent journey—hope, love, joy, and peace. Celebrate the birth of Jesus! The waiting is almost over; the Messiah is coming. And even as we celebrate His arrival in our world, our anticipation grows—and we continue to live with longing and expectation for His second coming when His work will be complete and all the earth will be restored. Yet even now on the eve of Jesus's birth, we rejoice. Christ has come! He will come again!



Read

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.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the

glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. —Luke 2:1-20

How have you most felt Jesus's hope, peace, joy, or love this season?

Memorize

Say all the verses you have memorized during the weeks of Advent.

Sing

"Go Tell It on the Mountain"

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CHRISTMAS EVE: AN EXPECTANT PAUSE

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. —Luke 2:4-5

"**This is** *sooo* **not what we need right now!**" Mary and Joseph must have thought when they found out they had to report in Bethlehem for that Roman census. Mary should have been at home nesting, preparing the nursery, cleaning the cupboards, or weirdly reorganizing the hut for the twelfth time. If you're a parent, you know what I mean. But instead of those final preparations, Mary had to endure a 90-mile journey on foot through the cold desert winter.

In pregnancy, you know the time is drawing near, but you never know exactly when the baby is coming. There are contractions. There may be false starts. But one moment you are rearranging the kitchen, and the next, labor has begun. There's no going back. Your body and mind completely focus on the process of labor. This new life is entering the world, and your life will never be exactly the same.

In these moments, there is joy and there is uncertainty. There is contentment and there is expectation. There is the planned and the unexpected. There is completion and there is the journey ahead. Here on Christmas Eve, we find all the same things. As we finish our Christmas preparations, let's also pause to rest a few minutes in the expectant now. The celebration will erupt. The emotions will swirl. The memories will be created. Our lives will add another new day, a special day not exactly like any other, and in that sense, our lives will never be the same. Like Mary, let's ponder and treasure these moments in our hearts as we reflect on this threshold of birth and life, expectation and celebration, and God turned human in our hearts and lives.

What is heavy on your heart in the anticipation of Christmas? What is joyful in your expectant spirit?

30

CHRISTMAS DAY: THE BEST NEWS

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."

—Luke 2:10-11

There's been so much bad news this year in the era of doomscrolling. How about some good news headlines? History brings us some momentous ones: "Peace. Greatest War of All Time Over." "Victory. Nazis Reveal Surrender." "Man Walks on the Moon." "Nelson Mandela Freed." But we can also find these feel-good stories from the past year: "A 6-year-old ordered $350 in Barbies from Amazon. Her parents gave them to a hospital." "A farmer fell ill. So dozens of his neighbors showed up spontaneously and harvested his crops." "Bride and groom had extra food. So they took it to a shelter and served it."

Today we celebrate the best, most momentous news of all time: Christ has come! Jesus is here! He comes in the midst of troubling times. He brings hope in our despair. He brings peace in our worry. He brings joy in our sorrow. He brings love in our conflict. He brings life in our death. This is the good news angels announced in the night. It is the good news we can proclaim on this morning. Jesus is who we expectantly await in Advent, and Jesus is who we celebrate at Christmas. He is the Good News no matter how troubling the times. Jesus is here. Jesus will come again. Jesus will never leave us. In Jesus, let's celebrate with hope, peace, love, and joy in our hearts as we worship with the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

How will you rejoice and celebrate today? How can you carry Christ's hope, peace, joy, and love forward with you all year?