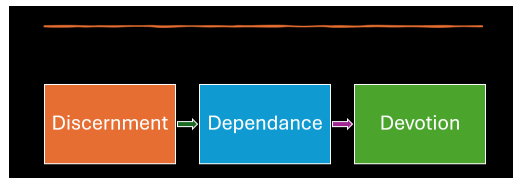


Advent #1
Alone
Matt 1:18-24

Eric Cepin
Dec. 1, 2024

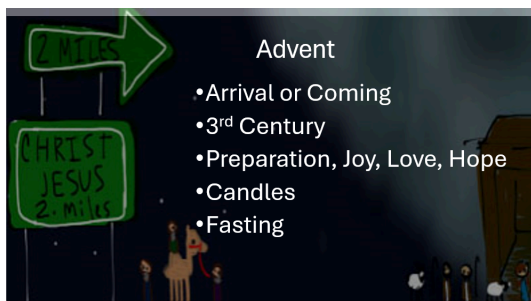
Fallow month is a time to slow down: December can be a crazy time: financial anxieties, gifts, stress, busyness...we don't want to add "busy" to your life. There are no meetings except Sunday morning. The invitation is NOT to buy into the cultural message to buy more and do more: you are invited into a different mindset that will develop three things:



We are hoping for all of these to happen in your life this month. And Advent lined up for once in a very long time at the beginning of the month. Here is the church calendar that is designed to disciple us. We are all sheep who easily wander and these four categories bring us back:



We are in Advent, which means "arrival or coming," in this case, of Jesus. At this point, we look backwards and forwards: there is anticipation that is nurtured by looking back. We can go back to the 3rd century.



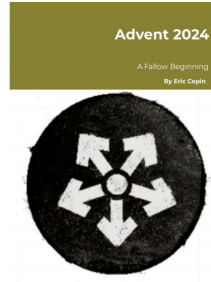
Candles entered in no particular order: typically, 3 purple, 1 pink, 1 white. They are used to tell the story of Jesus's birth. There are different narratives but all use fasting, usually on Fridays. It's the idea

of taking away sometimes (often food) so when we feel hungry, we fill ourselves with Jesus.

With this in mind, we will start with a M-W digital fast: video games, social media, TV except for what you need for your job. If this seems too daunting, just remove one thing (doom-scrolling Youtube?). There are instructions in the devotional that each family (or single adult) will get today.

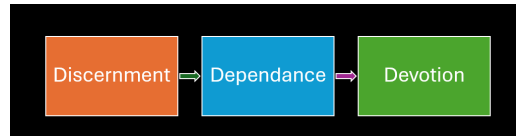
A Three Day Digital Fast

- Give it a shot
- Fortune favors the bold
- He who risks nothing gains nothing
- You miss 100% of the shots you don't take
- Better to try and fail than never to try at all
- Nothing ventured, nothing gained



Just try this! "CAN'T never did nothing!"

This project was with the intention of developing discernment, dependence, and devotion to Jesus.



Alone, Angry, Afraid, and Ashamed

The Four Black Candles of Advent

Genesis 3:23 So the Lord God **banished** him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he **drove** the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a **flaming sword flashing back and forth** to guard the way to the tree of life.

The black candles we will be using this year came from a blog I read once that had the idea of each candle representing an extreme emotion of the world Jesus is born into.

Banished, drove, flaming swords means Adam & Eve didn't want to leave the garden; they wanted to go back to the garden. I think Christmas is our attempt to get back to the place of not being **alone** and **ashamed** and **afraid**. The beauty of the black candles is that when we get to the

candlelight service, we will BLOW OUT the black candles and celebrate that Jesus takes these things on himself. We are inviting you into a discipleship process that develops discernment, dependence, and devotion.

ALONE

Week One: Matthew 1:18-24

Today we will talk about being alone. Let's walk through this from Joseph's perspective.

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was *pledged to be married to Joseph*, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the *Holy Spirit*.

You can translate this: This is the birth of our savior and this is how it came about.

Joseph has a problem in that his wife is pregnant before they came together. Joseph had a plan that he would marry Mary and have a carpentry business and have little children and host Jewish BBQs in the future. But it didn't work out this way: I can identify with him somewhat.

Being alone in the Christmas season can feel emotionally elevating. This past week was full of traditions for us: soup supper, pie bake but Sue was sick. We also had Covid in our home and had to cancel Thanksgiving: all the little things that happen normally didn't happen and when you set your heart on things that don't happen, you feel powerless and on the outside. This is how Joseph felt: his plans didn't go the way he wanted them to go, the way his life 'should' go.

19 Because Joseph her husband was **faithful to the law** (Deut. 22:23-24;24:1), and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had **considered** this

The word **considered** means thinking through something, often with emotions involved. For Joseph, betrothment was interrupted: his wife-to-be said she was pregnant with the Holy Spirit. Who could he possibly talk to about this? But he was a man of the Law which said to expose Mary, possibly stone her, and the child would not survive. This was disgraceful when he considered it, he realized that it would be equally disgraceful to marry her. So he wanted to divorce her quietly.

Joseph is also a man of prayer and has an experience with an angel:

^{20b} an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be **afraid** to take Mary home as your wife, **because** what is conceived in her is from the **Holy Spirit**. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus**, because he will **save** his people from their **sins**."

Most of us don't see an angel when we pray even though we would appreciate direct communication. Because Joseph was faithful to the Law, he was praying and considering and then fell asleep. At this point, God spoke to him: "Do not be afraid." Immediately, Joseph wrestles with what he should do if he marries Mary. There is a shadow over them, people will talk and he will be isolated. This is not the story he wanted! But the angel tells him what Mary says is true. When things happen like this for us, we tell a very

myopic story with **ourselves at the center**. But Jesus always changes the story to HIM at the center. The angel tells Joseph he would be the **guardian of God**, the one God himself watches to learn obedience, the one he takes to Egypt to save him.

24 When Joseph **woke up**, he **did** what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. **And he gave him the name Jesus.**

God rewrites our story to require more of us and thereby increases our trust.

Notice that once Joseph knew what to do, he did it. He trusted God and took on responsibility.

22 All this took place to **fulfill** what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and **they** will call him Immanuel” (which means “**God with us**”). (Isaiah 7:14)

Matthew tells us about the birth but notice the word **THEY:** this is referring to YOU along with the people over the last 2,000 years. We will call him **Emmanuel!** This means “God with us.” We are not alone, we are not abandoned. Joseph chooses to be a guardian and that means we can choose this as well.

But how does this work? I think this is what the Village needs to hear from Acts 2: The filling of the Holy Spirit is such a beautiful, transformative moment in history!

Acts 2:15 These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I can be in the place of Joseph where God will speak to me. When you feel alone, you have a moment where you can choose to tell the story centered on you OR you can ask God to show up and understand it. This will produce dependency: you care about what is being said and you listen carefully. This is when we can actually hear the voice of God better! This leads to

clarity where you will be invited to tell a BIGGER story. This leads to devotion built around action.

Discernment

Dependence

Devotion

I want to invite you to take this story in Matthew and reflect on Joseph's projection: You don't hear a lot of Joseph in the Christmas songs we hear. I think, though, we are invited to watch this man and learn from him.

