

ADVENT 2024



*This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.*

WHAT CHILD IS THIS, WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX (1865)

Nate & Louise Johnson

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Johnson and Pritchard Family Picture

WAITING AND MYSTERY. Two words that simultaneously stir uncertainty and curiosity, tension and wonder. There are a lot of times that I'd honestly like to avoid both. Waiting requires patience, and mystery involves embracing the unknowable, and those things chafe a bit against my tendency to want to live an efficient, well-planned, and thought-out life. And yet, every year for the past decade or so, the Christmas season approaches and I find myself drawn in again to the tensions of the season: longing, waiting, and fulfillment, darkness and light, the knowable and mysterious.

This journey started with a post-Thanksgiving dinner conversation with some missionary friends who were visiting us in Germany many years ago. As we sat around the table eating pie, we started sharing Christmas traditions like favorite foods, when we decorate, and how we do gifts. While chatting, our friends shared that they tried to intentionally keep Advent and Christmas separate.

They went on to share how sitting for weeks with the longing of God's people for a deliverer in the accounts of the Old Testament brought a deeper richness to their celebration of Christmas.

This idea was intriguing to our family, so we decided to try it. We created playlists on our music apps with songs that focused on the waiting and longing that come before the celebration of Jesus' birth. We ordered books to read with the kids that built excitement in the weeks leading up to Christmas and books for the adults to dive into, too. Four candles were placed on the table and lit daily following Advent traditions as December 25th approached. We got a Jesse Tree (well, it was a garland, but the same idea), to which we added ornaments each day, reviewing the story arc of the Old Testament as we anticipated Jesus' arrival in the New. We let the anticipation of Christmas Day build, feeling a little more deeply the waiting and the following celebration of Jesus' birth.

Sitting in the tensions of Advent requires patience and the embracing of mysteries that are difficult.

It turns out that our friends were on to something. The conversation and challenge that Thanksgiving was a gift to us, and we've intentionally added Advent traditions to our Decembers ever since. There is something deep, true, and relatable about acknowledging the darkness that makes the arrival of the light seem that much brighter, both in ancient times and today. Pondering the mysteries of a God who hears the cries and longings of His people yet acts in His own timing, a virgin birth, and the sky communicating with wise men make the actual appearance of Jesus on the scene that much richer. It also reminds us that there is hope and a longing for Jesus to come again and make all the broken things of this world right. Sitting in the tensions of Advent requires patience and the embracing of mysteries that are difficult. But as a result, we experience profound joy at Christmas when we are reminded again that Hope came down in the form of a newborn baby.

I realize that this letter will arrive in your mailbox mid-way through December. Your calendar is likely already filled with normal yearly traditions and extra seasonal festivities. Many of you probably already have a holiday rhythm that includes some time for diving into the Old Testament as Christmas approaches and are aware of the depth it can

END-OF-YEAR FINANCIAL UPDATE

We are very grateful that God has provided enough through your generosity to sustain our family this year. We have been bouncing between the positive and negative in our work account in 2024, but God has provided one-time gifts at just the right moments. Looking at the year ahead, we need to raise a little less than \$850 a month or \$10,200 in special gifts to meet our anticipated budget. If you would like to contribute toward those needs, please use the QR code below or go to our Cadence page and click "Give Now" at the top of the page. Please join us in praying for God's provision of those finances so we can continue to focus on caring for the WestPac team and their ministries.

add to the season. But if you haven't got that set already, might I encourage you to take even a little time to sit with the "before" of the Christmas story? Maybe light a candle one evening and listen to Andrew Peterson's Behold the Lamb of God album? Or read some of the accounts of the people named in Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke in your Bible study times. I trust that pondering the whole of Jesus' birth story, including the parts before His arrival, will bless you as much as it has us over the years.

May the waiting, longing, and mystery of this season stir hope, wonder, and joy in you this Christmas and in the coming year.

We love you,
Louise, for the Johnsons



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