



DAY ONE

ISAIAH 7:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

HARK! WHEN YOU HEAR THE BELLS

If you thumb through Scripture, you'll notice how waiting weaves itself into the fabric of history. God waits. Creation waits. Humankind waits. We wait for reconciliation and redemption, healing and wholeness. We crane our necks, strain our ears for bells of freedom to ring and jingle.

Throughout the Bible, a question reverberates:

"How long?"

Those two little words appear more than fifty times in Scripture, and it's no wonder, because waiting is part of all our stories. Adam and Eve wait, fresh fruit stain their faces, for God to discover what they have done. Noah waits for the first raindrops to pitter-patter on his odd-shaped boat. Abram waits for a promised son, Jacob waits for a promised wife, and the Israelites wait for a promised new life.

For four hundred years, the prophets wait in silence for a syllable from God. All heaven and humanity hold their breath for the arrival of Immanuel.

Deep in the fabric of our souls, we wonder, "How long must we wait?" The truth about waiting is God asks this question, too.

In Exodus 10:3, Moses and Aaron deliver the God's message to Pharaoh: "This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.'"

CELEBRATE WONDER AND JOY

God is at work in the waiting, even when the wait seems long, to bring the Israelites and each of us, step by step, toward salvation and redemption.

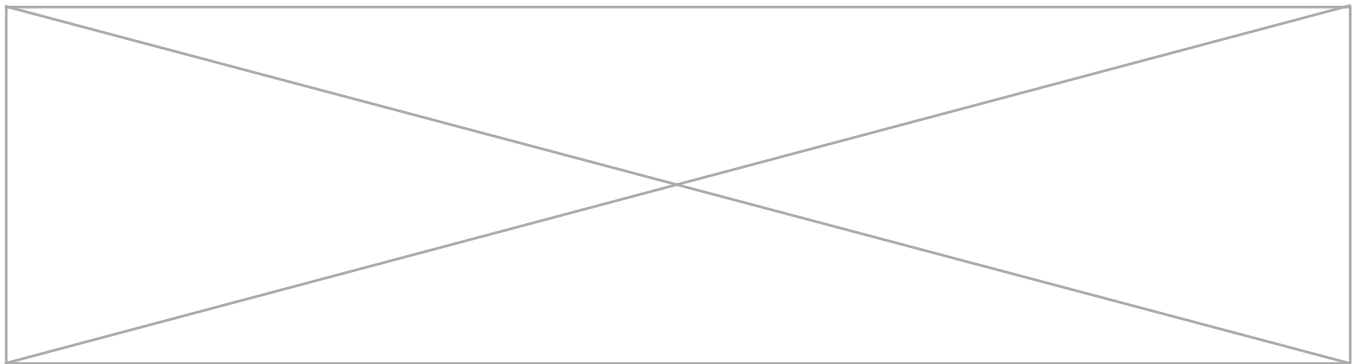
God sends a baby boy in a basket to deliver the Israelites freedom.

God sends a baby boy in a barn to deliver us freedom.

God asks, "How long?", then delivers the answer, the gift of freedom in person.

Hark! The bells of freedom in Christ ring for you.

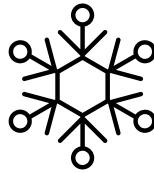
Your freedom arrives in a divine plan, a holy person, a sacred child. Whenever you hear bells jingle this holiday season, celebrate the wonder that your freedom rings in Christ.



Reflection Questions:

1. What are you waiting on God for most this Advent season?
2. In what area of your life do you need to hear Christ ring the bells of freedom?
3. How does materialism and commercialism drown out the bells of freedom Christ has rung for you?
4. Using the Color Method, what stood out to you most from today's Scripture?
5. What do you find most challenging in today's passages? Most comforting?

CELEBRATE WONDER AND JOY



DAY TWO

MATTHEW 1:1-7 NKJV

¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: ²Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. ⁴Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon ⁵Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, ⁶and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. ⁷Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa.

GOD IS NOT AFRAID OF THIS

Matthew launches his story with a genealogy of Jesus, marking the beginning of the arrival of the Messiah and the coming of the kingdom of God. Several women appear in the genealogy—a rarity in Jewish genealogical records. To the first readers of Matthew's Gospel, their inclusion caused jaws to drop and mouths to gape.

These women hang dirty laundry on Jesus' family tree. Tamar is abandoned and pretends to be a prostitute. Rahab is a prostitute and traitor; Ruth, a gentile widow and immigrant; Bathsheba, an adulteress.

For the Biblical statistician, three of the four were gentiles, considered unclean by the Jews and three of the four were involved in adultery. Those are bad odds.

Yet Matthew does more than mention these women, he highlights them, and in the process, reveals that God uses people with shady pasts in unfold His plan to save the world. Gentiles. Sinners. Prostitutes. Adulteresses. And men

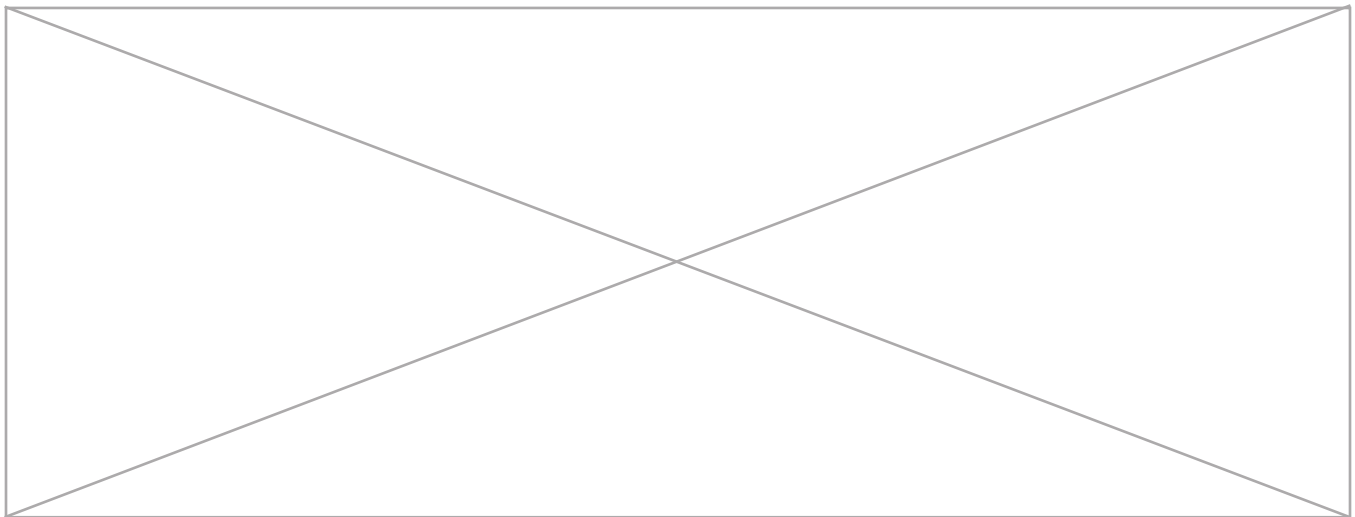
CELEBRATE WONDER AND JOY

who deceive, murder, and steal. Together, their stories remind us:

God uses imperfect people to accomplish His perfect purposes.

These women and men are vital to delivering the greatest gift to the world.

Like each of them, none of your past sins keep you from service in God's plan. No matter where you've been, no matter what you've done, God wants you to be part of His redemptive work.



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