

JOHN PIPER

The

Dawning

of

Indestructible

JOY

DAILY READINGS FOR ADVENT

*The Dawning of
Indestructible Joy*

DAILY READINGS FOR ADVENT

JOHN PIPER

 **CROSSWAY**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Dawning of Indestructible Joy: Daily Readings for Advent

Copyright © 2014 by Desiring God Foundation

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Erik Maldre

Cover image: The Bridgeman Art Library

First printing 2014

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. 2011 Text Edition. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from *The New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-4236-7

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-4239-8

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-4237-4

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-4238-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Piper, John, 1946-

[Meditations. Selections]

The Dawning of indestructible joy : daily readings for
Advent / John Piper.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-4335-4236-7 (tp)

1. Advent—Meditations. 2. Bible. New Testament—

Devotional use. I. Title.

BV40.P53 2014

242'.332—dc23

2014007719

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LB 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Sam Storms,
comrade in Christian Hedonism,
precious friend for indestructible joy.

Contents

Preface		7
Introduction	Praying for Fullness This Christmas (John 1:14–16)	11
December 1	The Search-and-Save Mission (Luke 19:10)	15
December 2	Prepare Your Heart for Christ (John 5:44)	17
December 3	Draw Near to the Savior (Heb. 13:20–21)	19
December 4	What Advent Is All About (Mark 10:45)	21
December 5	Why Christmas Happened (1 John 3:5, 8)	23
December 6	God’s Passion for God at Christmas (John 12:27–28)	25
December 7	He Comes to Bless Us (Acts 3:22–26)	29
December 8	God Can Be Trusted (Acts 3:22–26)	31
December 9	Why the Son of Man? (John 1:51)	35
December 10	What Christmas Came to Destroy (1 John 3:8)	37
December 11	The Celebration of God’s Love (John 3:16)	39
December 12	The Glory of the Word Made Flesh (John 1:1)	41

December 13	Christmas Cut History in Half (Acts 3:24)	45
December 14	The Mercy He Promises (Rom. 15:8–9)	49
December 15	Our Truest Treasure (Matt. 2:10)	51
December 16	Freed to Be Part of God’s Family (Mark 10:45)	53
December 17	He Came to Serve (Mark 10:44)	55
December 18	Graciously and Tenderly Frustrating (Rom. 3:25–26)	57
December 19	The Gift You Cannot Buy (Acts 17:24–25)	61
December 20	Receive His Reconciliation (Rom. 5:11)	63
December 21	Get Your Eyes Ready for Christmas (Matt. 16:15–17)	65
December 22	Something Worth Singing About (Heb. 8:4–10)	67
December 23	Our Deepest Need at Christmas (Mic. 5:4–5)	69
December 24	Enjoy All the Promises of God (Mic. 5:2–4)	73
December 25	Grace: The Dominant Note of Christmas (John 6:51)	77
Conclusion	A Savior Is Born! God Gets the Glory, You Get the Peace (Luke 2:11–14)	81
A Word of Thanks		93
Desiring God: A Note on Resources		95

Preface

I feel like the apostle Peter at the end of his life, as he wrote his second letter. Twice he told his readers why he was writing to them. In the first chapter he said, “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder” (2 Pet. 1:13). Then, in the last chapter, he said it again: “I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder” (2 Pet. 3:1).

His aim was first to remind them. And then, by reminding them, to stir them up. That’s what this little book of Advent devotional readings is for—reminders and stirrings.

The Greek word for “stir up” is used most often for waking someone from sleep. That’s the way it’s used, for example, in Mark 4:39: “[Jesus] *awoke* and rebuked the wind.” Peter assumes that his Christian readers need to be wakened. I know I continually need awakening. Especially when Christmas approaches.

I am prone to be dull, spiritually drowsy, halfhearted, lukewarm. That is the way human beings are, including Christians, even about great things. Peter knows it and is writing to “awaken” or to “stir up” his readers so that they don’t just know but also feel the wonder of the truth.

That's why I have written these devotions. What you and I need is usually not a brand-new teaching. Brand-new truths are probably not truths. What we need are reminders about the greatness of the old truths. We need someone to say an old truth in a fresh way. Or sometimes, just to say it.

What Peter really means, and what I mean, by being “awakened” or “stirred up” is to feel some measure of the joy God intends for Christmas to bring. “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10). Not small joy. Not modest joy. But “great joy.” If we don't feel this when we ponder the incarnation of the Son of God, we need “awakening.” We need to be “stirred up.”

I have called Christmas—and this little book—“the dawning of indestructible joy” because the joy Jesus was bringing into the world was like no other kind in history. Once we have it, it cannot be destroyed. Jesus said, “No one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).

The joy that Jesus came to bring is from outside this world. It is the very joy that Jesus himself has in God the Father—which he has had from all eternity and will have forever. There is no greater joy than the joy that God has in God, because God is the greatest object of joy, and God has the greatest powers to enjoy.

Jesus said, “I have spoken to you, that *my joy* may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). His joy was the very joy of God. He promises to put that in us. That is what the Holy Spirit does. He pours out the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and with it the joy of God in God. “The

fruit of the Spirit is love, joy . . .” (Gal. 5:22). This is “great joy.” And it cannot be taken away. It is indestructible.

Ah, but it can go to sleep. That’s why Peter says, “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder” (2 Pet. 1:13). Yes. It is very right. Because, oh, how wrong, how sad, when we stand before great wonders and feel nothing. It is right, therefore, that he write and I write to awaken and stir up our affections for the greatest wonder of all: the arrival and the work and the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in this world.

May the Spirit of God use these words to open your eyes afresh to the glories of Christ and give you a new taste of your indestructible joy.

INTRODUCTION

Praying for Fullness This Christmas

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For *from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

JOHN 1:14–16

It was a drenching moment for me that Advent. A man in our church had just prayed the words of John 1:14–16 in a pre-service prayer meeting. God granted me in that moment that the word “fullness” fill me. It was an extraordinary experience. There was a kind of Holy Spirit soaking.

I felt some measure of what the word really carries—*the fullness of Christ*. I felt some of the wonder that I had indeed received grace upon grace from this fullness. And I was at that moment receiving grace upon grace. I felt right then that nothing would have been sweeter than to simply sit at his feet—or read my Bible—all afternoon and feel his fullness overflow.

Introduction

Why did this fullness have such an impact on me—and why is it still to this moment affecting me unusually? In part because:

- the one from whose fullness I am being drenched with grace is the *Word* that was with God and *was God* (John 1:1–2), so that his fullness is the fullness of God—a *divine fullness, an infinite fullness*;
- this Word became flesh and so was one of us and was pursuing us with his fullness—so it is an *accessible fullness*;
- when this Word appeared in human form, his *glory* was seen—his is a *glorious fullness*;
- this Word was “the only Son from the Father” so that the divine fullness was being mediated to me not just from God but through God—God did not send an angel but *his only Son to deliver his fullness*;
- the fullness of the Son is a fullness of grace—I will not drown in this fullness but be *blessed in every way by this fullness*;
- this fullness is not only a fullness of grace but also of truth—I am not being graced with truth-ignoring flattery; *this grace is rooted in rock-solid reality.*

As I savor this illumination of Christ’s fullness, I hear Paul say, “In him *the whole fullness of deity* dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9). I hear him say, “In him all *the fullness of God* was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:19). And again, “In him are hidden *all the treasures* of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Paul prays that we would *experience* Christ’s fullness—not just know about it, but be filled with it. Here is the way I hear

him praying for me: he prays that I “may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that [I] may be filled with all the *fullness of God*” (Eph. 3:18–19).

The “fullness of God” is *experienced*, he says, as we are given the “strength to comprehend” the love of Christ in its height and depth and length and breadth. That is, in its *fullness*. This is remarkable: the fullness of God is the spiritual comprehension (experience) of the fullness of the love of Christ. It fills the Son of God and pours out on us.

So when I hear Paul speak to the Romans of “the fullness of the blessing of Christ” (Rom. 15:29), I hear him describing my experience. How I long for you all to know this.

Give yourself time and quietness in this Advent season and seek this experience. Pray for yourself the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:14–19—“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”—that you may have power “to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”

That is my prayer for you this Christmas—that you would experience the fullness of Christ; that you would know in your heart the outpouring of grace upon grace; that the glory of the only Son from the Father would shine into your heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ; that you would be amazed that Christ can be so real to you.

DECEMBER I

The Search-and-Save Mission

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

LUKE 19:10

The word *advent* means “coming.” In this season of the year, we focus on the meaning of the coming of the Son of God into the world. And the spirit of our celebration should be the spirit in which he came. And the spirit of that coming is summed up in Luke 19:10: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The coming of Jesus was a search-and-save mission. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

So Advent is a season for thinking about the mission of God to seek and to save lost people from the wrath to come. God raised him from the dead, “Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). It’s a season for cherishing and worshiping this characteristic of God—that he is a searching and saving God, that he is a God on a mission, that he is not

December 1

aloof or passive or indecisive. He is never in the maintenance mode, coasting or drifting. He is sending, pursuing, searching, saving. That's the meaning of Advent.

The book of Acts is a celebration of this advent heart of God's—on the move to seek and to save the lost. It's a narration of Jesus's ongoing advent into more and more peoples of the world. Acts is the story of how the early church understood the words, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). It's the story of how the vertical advent of God in the mission of Jesus bends out and becomes the horizontal advent of Jesus in the mission of the church. In us.

Jesus came into the world at the first Advent, and every Advent since is a reminder of his continual advent into more and more lives. And that advent is, in fact, our advent—our coming, our moving into the lives of those around us and into the peoples of the world.

DECEMBER 2

Prepare Your Heart for Christ

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

JOHN 5:44

God owns and controls all things. And there is nothing that he could give you for Christmas this year that would suit your needs and your longings better than the consolation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem, restoration for past losses and liberation from future enemies, forgiveness and freedom, pardon and power, healing the past and sealing the future.

If there is a longing in your heart this Advent for something that the world has not been able to satisfy, might not this longing be God's Christmas gift preparing you to see Christ as consolation and redemption and to receive him for who he really is?

How is the heart prepared to receive Christ for who he really is? It is very simple.

December 2

First, the heart must become disenchanted with the praise of men. “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from God?” (John 5:44; 7:17–18).

Second, the heart must become disenchanted with the sufficiency of money and things to satisfy the soul. “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him” (Luke 16:14).

Then, third, alongside this disenchantment with the praise of men and the power of money, there must come into the heart a longing for consolation and a redemption beyond what the world can give.

Fourth and finally, there must be a revelation from God the Father, opening the eyes of the heart so that it cries out, like a man who stumbles onto an incredible treasure, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, the consolation of my past, the redemption of my future. Now I see you. Now I receive you—for who you really are.”

May God do this for you this Advent. May this be your gift, and your witness, and the testimony of many this Advent.

DECEMBER 3

Draw Near to the Savior

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

HEBREWS 13:20-21

One of the things pleasing in God's sight is that his people keep on drawing near to him forever and ever. And so he is working in us this very thing.

Hebrews 13:21 says he is doing this "*through Jesus Christ,*" which means, at least, that Jesus has purchased this grace for us by his death and that Jesus prays and asks the Father for it on the basis of that death.

In other words, when the writer of Hebrews tells us that drawing near to God is what qualifies us for the eternal saving work of our High Priest, he doesn't mean to say that our High Priest leaves us alone in our sinful bent and natural resistance,

December 3

as if we could draw near to God on our own. Rather, our High Priest intercedes for us and asks the Father to do just what Hebrews 13:21 says he will do—work in us what is pleasing in his sight—“through Jesus Christ.”

Let me illustrate this by the way it looked when our High Priest was on the earth. In Luke 22:31–32 Jesus says to Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” So already Jesus was interceding for his own when he was on the earth. And he was praying that Peter’s faith—*that his faith—our faith—not fail*.

Moreover, he was so confident in his prayer for Peter that he said, “*When* you have turned again,” not, “*If* you turn again.” So even though Peter stumbled in denial, his faith did not fail utterly. That is what the Lord prays for us. This is one more piece of our great security and hope in this great epistle of assurance.

Is it not a wonderful thing this Advent season to know that God bids us come? That this great, holy God of righteousness and wrath says, “Draw near to me through my Son, your High Priest. Draw near to me. *Draw near to me*”?

This is his invitation in these Advent readings: “Draw near to me through your High Priest. Draw near to me in confession and prayer and meditation and trust and praise. Come. I will not cast you out.” For Christ “is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

DECEMBER 4

What Advent Is All About

Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

MARK 10:45

Christmas is about the coming of Christ into the world. It's about the Son of God, who existed eternally with the Father as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," taking on human nature and becoming man (Heb. 1:3).

It's about the virgin birth of a child conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit so that he is the Son of God, not the way you and I are sons of God, but in an utterly unique way (Luke 1:35).

It's about the coming of a man named Jesus in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9).

It's about the coming of the "fullness of time" that had been prophesied by the prophets of old that a ruler would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2); and a child would be born called

December 4

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6); and a Messiah, an anointed one, a shoot from the stem of Jesse, a Son of David, a King, would come (Isa. 11:1–4; Zech. 9:9).

And, according to Mark 10:45, Christmas is about the coming of the Son of Man who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” These words in Mark 10:45, as a brief expression of Christmas, are what I hope God will fix in your mind and heart this Advent.

Open your heart to receive the best present imaginable: *Jesus giving himself to die for you and to serve you all the rest of eternity.* Receive this. Turn away from self-help and sin. Become like little children. Trust him. *Trust him.* Trust him with your life.

DECEMBER 5

Why Christmas Happened

You know that he appeared in order to take away sins,
and in him there is no sin. . . . The reason the Son of
God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

1 JOHN 3:5, 8

Two times in 1 John 3:1–10 we are told why Christmas happened—that is, why the eternal, divine Son of God came into the world as human.

In verse 5, John says, “You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.” So the sinlessness of Christ is affirmed—“In him there is no sin.” And the reason for his coming is affirmed—“He appeared in order to take away sins.”

Then in the second part of verse 8, John says, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” And the specific focus John has in mind when he says “works of the devil” is the sin that the Devil promotes. We see

December 5

that in the first part of verse 8: “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.” So the works of the Devil that Jesus came to destroy are the works of sin.

So two times John tells us that Christmas happened—the Son of God became human—to take away sin, or to destroy the works of the Devil, namely, sin. Jesus was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18–20) and “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52) and was perfectly obedient and sinless in all his life and ministry, all the way to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 4:15)—in order to destroy the works of the Devil—to take away sin.

Our sin. Make this personal and love him for it. Take the very personal words of the apostle Paul and make them your own. “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). This is how he destroyed the works of the Devil and rescued us from our sin. Don’t leave Christmas in the abstract. Your sin. Your conflict with the Devil. Your victory. He came for this.

Advent is for adoring Jesus.

The Christmas season is one of the busiest times of the year. But it is also a season of reflection and preparation for that special day when we mark Immanuel's coming—the arrival of our eternal God in our own frail humanity.

This is the greatest of history's many wonders, something too stupendous to celebrate just on one day. Advent is a way of lengthening and intensifying the joy of Christmas.

These 25 brief devotional readings from John Piper begin on December 1 and carry us to Christmas Day. Our hope is that God would use these meditations to deepen and sweeten your adoration of Jesus and help you keep him at the center of your Christmas season.

This is my prayer for you this Christmas—

that you would experience the fullness of Christ;
that you would know in your heart the outpouring of grace upon grace;
that the glory of the only Son from the Father would shine into your hearts;
that you would be amazed that Christ can be so real to you.

—from the Introduction

JOHN PIPER is teacher and founder of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary. He is the author of more than 50 books, including *Desiring God*, *Don't Waste Your Life*, and *When I Don't Desire God*.

ADVENT

