



Hope Begins

An Advent Study

Dear Friends,

This is HOPE's third year of providing an Advent Study for the Christmas season. It is truly an honor to produce this small study to point you to the truths of the Gospel. For it is the Gospel that opened our doors back in 1997 and it is the Gospel that sustains us today as we finish up 2021, our 24th year of service.

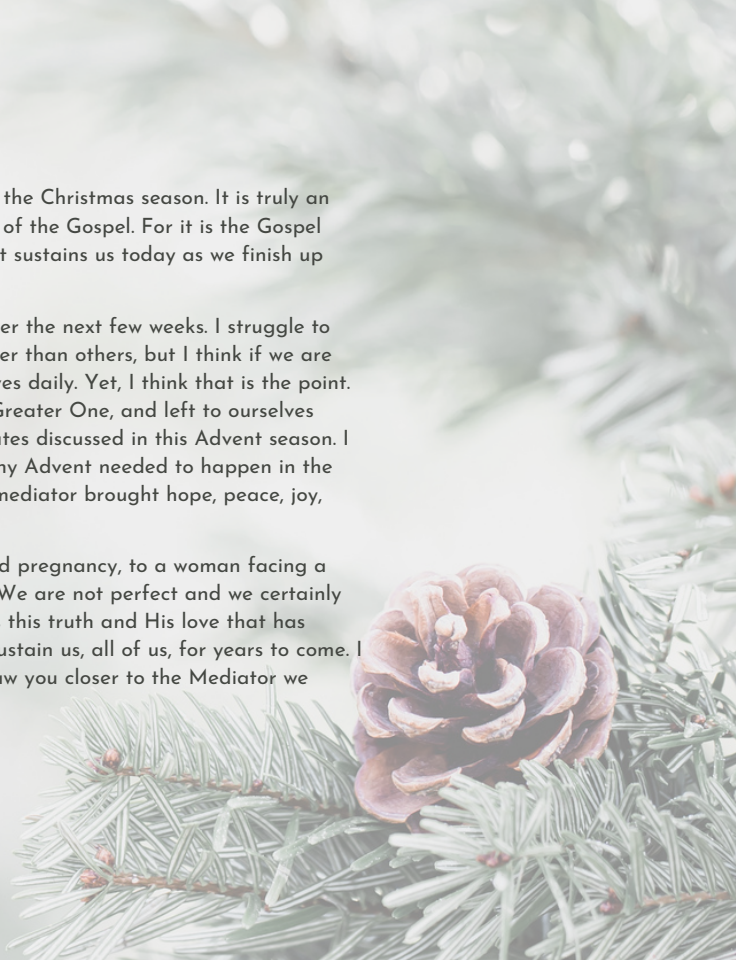
I often fail to live up to the truths you are about to read over the next few weeks. I struggle to be hopeful, peaceful, joyful, and loving. Some days are better than others, but I think if we are all honest we would admit that failures can populate our lives daily. Yet, I think that is the point. The point of the Gospel is that you and I are in need of a Greater One, and left to ourselves and our own vices we will be a people lacking of the attributes discussed in this Advent season. I don't say this to put us in a hole, but instead to highlight why Advent needed to happen in the first place. Our shortcomings needed a mediator and that mediator brought hope, peace, joy, and love to a lost and dying world.

That mediator brought hope to a mom facing an unplanned pregnancy, to a woman facing a drug addiction, and to a family in need of a hand in 2021. We are not perfect and we certainly have our faults, but we would be nothing without Jesus. It is this truth and His love that has sustained HOPE for over two decades and will ultimately sustain us, all of us, for years to come. I pray the next few weeks would be life-giving and would draw you closer to the Mediator we didn't deserve, but God provided anyway.

Because He Lives,



Andrew Wood
Executive Director



Week 1 - Hope

I can't be the only one that eagerly anticipates this time of year...every year. As soon as the calendar turns to September my office is filled with Christmas music, dim lights, and YouTube's best fireplace video on loop. I have been like this much of my life. I am not that old, but my dad was old-fashioned and made Christmas music a staple in our home as he wired up speakers around the house that were connected to the record player (he still plays records today.) Great Christmas albums from Dolly, Kenny, Alabama, and the Oak Ridge Boys were always a must. Times have changed as Justin Bieber, Michael Bublé, and Pentatonix populate my kids' playlist on Alexa, but the feeling and anticipation of this time of year is just as strong today as it was when I was a little boy.

I think much of that is due to the Hope we have in the first Advent that brought Jesus to Earth. Christmas albums, warm feelings, and traditions will come and go, but Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever. I don't know about you, but that truth has done a great deal to sustain me over the past 20 months. We have seen a lot of things turned upside down, but our God is in the business of turning things right side up. That is the hope we have today and through this season.



Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Dear Gods

Thank you for the hope of Jesus. Thank you for this season. Thank you for these traditions. Help us to rest in the truth of your goodness, sameness, and love for us. In Your name, Amen.



Kayla, Kojak, + Kai

Kayla came to HOPE as a 15 year-old high school student. Though her parents were not involved, her boyfriend and his parents were very supportive and helped her attend her mentoring appointments and parenting classes. She earned her baby shower, and her baby girl is now almost 6 years old!



Luke 1:26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Dear God,

We need Your peace today. We need you to calm the storms, to heal, and to bring the dead to life. We need you to mend relationships and renew our minds. Nothing that happens today or tomorrow is a surprise to you. Thank you for that truth and for loving us well. Thank you for the peace you bring. In Your name, Amen.

Week 2 - Peace

Everyone of us has a deep longing for peace. We long for peace in our souls, in our relationships, and in our world. When things seem to be out of sync we lash out, make adjustments, and seek to calm the turmoil. Sometimes these efforts ring hollow because we believe that calmness and peace is a man made construct. These attempts often fail because peace is not man made. Sure, we may be able to bring about peace in the short term, but ultimate peace is only found in the One that is called the Prince of Peace. Yes, I admit that the last sentence reads as overly churchy or cliché, but the truth, for those in Christ, is Jesus is the only one that can bring peace to any and all situations.

This doesn't mean that we won't face difficult times or uncertain circumstances. Instead, this means that when we find ourselves in unsettling scenarios we serve the One that calmed the storms (Mark 4:35-41), healed the sick by a touch of His cloak (Matthew 9:20-22), and brought the dead to life (John 11.) This idea of peace is what calmed Mary when she was told she would carry the Messiah. I can't imagine the turmoil she must have faced internally when this news sank in, but she was able to manage and find peace because of the One she was to carry. I pray for this type of peace for all of us today.

Learn about HOPE's services.



Claudia + Antonio

Claudia and her husband, Antonio, had been in the US for about two years when they came to HOPE. Though they were married, they had not been planning to have a baby so soon. Not having any knowledge of how to take care of a baby, Claudia attended parenting classes mainly for the education. Through her class participation, she found the friends, support, and community that she longed for. Claudia and Antonio gave birth to their son, Logan Antonio, in February 2018.

Week 3 - Joy

Joy is an interesting concept. Oftentimes, we equate this to happiness, but being joyful is so much more than being happy. Happiness is fleeting and depends on a number of factors, but joyfulness is lasting and goes deeper. This is why we see joy, not happiness, discussed in Matthew 2.

The dangers facing those seeking the Messiah were real. Threats had been made and uncertainty abounded, but the joy was ever present when they realized they were approaching the King.

These verses calm me as I think about our last couple of years. Uncertainty and chaos abounds in our world, but the joy brought by God remains steady. I don't want to pretend that we are never unsteady...we certainly are, but rest in the truth that the God of the universe is, in fact, as true and steady today as He was before the foundations of the universe.

Matthew 2:10-11

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Dear God,

Thank you for your steady hand on our lives. Thank you for the joy you bring when we are on the mountaintops and in the valleys. You are the constant that we need in our lives. In Your name, Amen.



Stacie + Brantley

Stacie first came to HOPE in 2018 for sexual health screening. She arrived feeling stressed and nervous, unsure about herself and her choices. She left her appointment feeling reassured, informed, and at ease. A few months later, Stacie returned to HOPE for well-woman care. As soon as she walked in our doors she felt remembered and cared for.

The next year, Stacie was facing an unplanned pregnancy. She was single, out of college, and unsure how to be a mom. As she recalls, "The only place I could think of was HOPE." She remembers feeling ashamed upon walking in to HOPE, but after meeting with our staff she says, "It solidified that these people mean something to me and I mean something to them. They made me feel better, they were there and they were going to help me." Stacie attended HOPE's parenting classes, received her baby shower, and her son, Brantley, was born in September 2019.



[Click here to watch Stacey's video.](#)



Week 4 - Love

We have made it!! This week is, without a doubt, my favorite week of the year. Christmas is here! I hope the past few weeks have brought you hope, peace, joy, and love. I hope you are connected with God on a deeper level. I pray that God has calmed your storms, brought healing, and mended relationships.

This week we focus on love as God so loved us that he sent Jesus. This week we will open stockings, unwrap gifts, and eat a lot of food, but I pray that we don't miss the greatest gift ever sent to this universe. The God of creation thought about you before the first star was in the sky. You were uniquely created and have intrinsic value because God is your author. I pray this truth sits deep today.

John 3:16-19

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Dear God,

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for creating, knowing, and seeing us. We did not deserve any of this, but you saw fit to provide. Thank you for Christmas. Thank you for the first Advent and a glimpse of the Second Advent to come. In Your name, Amen.



Elizabeth, Joel + Kaylee

When Elizabeth and Joel found out they were pregnant, Elizabeth had just resigned from her job and was pursuing an education degree.

Being away from her family made her situation difficult, but she says HOPE, her mentor, and the other moms in her parenting class became her family and helped ease her anxiety.

Their daughter, Kaylee, was born in 2018. Elizabeth was also able to earn her degree, and she and Joel got married in January 2020.

"HOPE was my family when we didn't have any here." - Elizabeth

"God constantly reminded us of His ultimate provision through each service at HOPE." - Joel



Merry Christmas!

HOPE
resource center

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