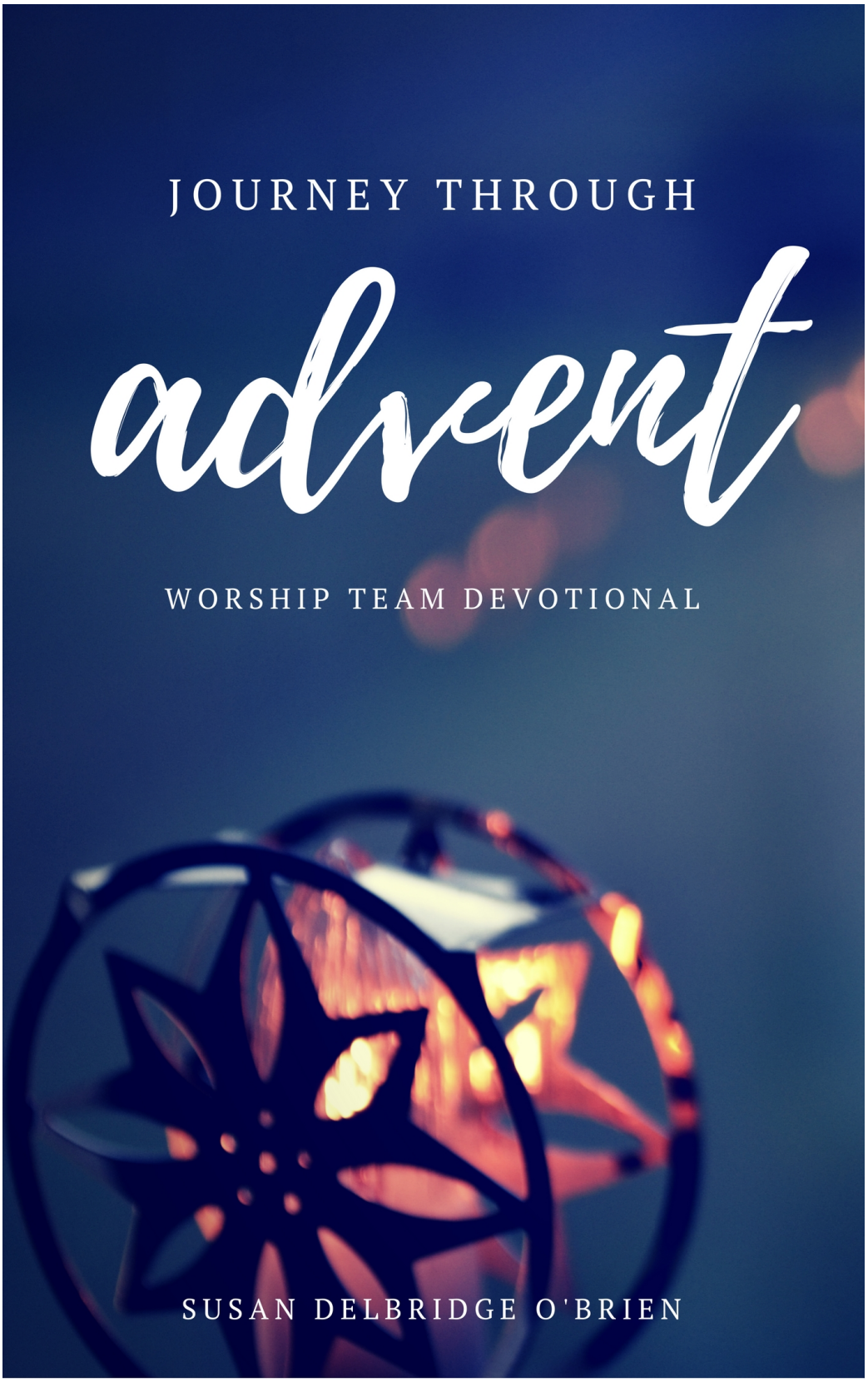

JOURNEY THROUGH
advent
WORSHIP TEAM DEVOTIONAL
SUSAN DELBRIDGE O'BRIEN

Journey Through Advent

A FOUR WEEK WORSHIP TEAM DEVOTIONAL

Susan Delbridge O'Brien

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This Advent season, come and journey alongside men and women whose ordinary lives changed the course of history.

This devotional is designed to be read aloud to your worship community as a part of your weekly rehearsal time. One person from the team can read the Scripture, another can be the timekeeper for the time of silence and the worship leader can read the lesson. All together, each lesson takes about 2-3 minutes.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Journey From Heaven to Mary's Womb:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in Obscurity

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Journey From Nazareth to Bethlehem:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in Your History

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Journey From the Fields to a Manger:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in the Ordinary

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Journey From East to West:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in Diversity

The First Sunday of Advent
Journey from Heaven to Mary's Womb:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in Obscurity

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:30-31

> "And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

Question

In what ways do you feel unseen?

Silence

Let us be silent for one minute together.

Devotional

Many who will attend church this week are struggling with feeling invisible. People post pictures and statuses on social media of their everyday lives to fight off that uncomfortable feeling of being unseen, unheard, and unnoticed. We may tend to view obscurity as frightening or even repulsive. Yet, Jesus embraces obscurity when He chooses to enter Mary's womb as a baby.

The womb is a dark and mysterious place and Jesus is still in the habit of entering dark and lonely places with us. Your most formative moments may not be seen by anyone, perhaps even yourself. Your most important work will not be done on the stage but in the prayers you pray in secret, the choices you make when no one is looking, and the way you love others.

Is Jesus creating something beautiful in you today in uncertainty and darkness? Do not be surprised if the process is messy, painful, and long (just like childbirth). Take heart, at the end of the pain is a beautiful gift.

Embrace a season of obscurity:

- ➢ Take a break from social media for a set period of time.
- ➢ Give honor to one another on the stage.
- ➢ Pay attention to people in your congregation: say hello, ask questions, listen when others speak.

- ➢ Look for ways to serve others anonymously: pay for someone's coffee behind you in line at the coffee bar, tape a $1 bill to the vending machine for the next person, write an anonymous note of encouragement.
- ➢ Avoid the worship rock star syndrome: leaving church early and missing the sermon, holding compliments from others a bit too closely, being unwilling to serve in more unseen ways.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for this season of Advent. Make us aware of your Presence in hidden spaces. Forgive us for trying to find our significance in being seen and noticed and in so doing forgetting to see and notice others. We remember that we are always seen by you and known by you. Let that be enough for us. Show us who we need to notice today. Amen

The Second Sunday of Advent
Journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in Your History

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:4-5

> "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child."

Question

What is your story (or testimony)?

Silence

Let us be silent for one minute together.

Devotional

Everyone you meet today has a unique story. Every place has a special history. As you sing and tell the story of God today, you are inviting others to see their story within God's story.

Bethlehem is a city full of reminders of God's love for His people. It is the city where Ruth gleans in Boaz's field and where years later their great-grandchild, David, is anointed king.

Your story goes back generations as well. God wants to speak to you in the story of your life. Have you ever considered the threads that weave through the tapestry of your life?

Embrace your stories and the stories of others:

- ➢ Celebrate your stories with others: birthdays, weddings, and holidays are all opportunities to tell your story in creative ways.
- ➢ Ask others to tell you their story, pay close attention to where God has been working in their lives and call it out to them.
- ➢ Look through old photos, watch home movies or read old journals.
- ➢ Get together with a childhood friend.
- ➢ Invite Jesus into your memories and listen to His point of view.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for this season of Advent. Make us more fully aware of your story, our story and the story of others today. Forgive us where we fail to pay attention to our lives and the lives of those around us. You are the great storyteller and we are grateful that you have weaved our stories together into your grand story. Amen.

The Third Sunday of Advent
Journey from the Fields to a Manger:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in the Ordinary

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-9

> "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear."

Question

Where in your life do you feel alone?

Silence

Let us be silent for one minute together.

Devotional

Isn't it interesting that God chooses to send His angelic birth announcement to a group of shepherds on the night shift? God speaks in the darkness and brings glory to the night. God meets people in the loneliest of places and reveals "glad tidings of great joy!"

Today you will encounter those who have an incredible fear of missing out. Some people may look at you on the stage and wish they could be a part of the band. Others may see the relationships around them and notice no one has even said hello to them. Today you can reassure those in your congregation that God comes to the darkest and loneliest places to reveal the good news that Jesus is with us.

The shepherds respond to this glorious invitation by saying "let us go and see!" God invites you today in your ordinary life to see Him. Jesus has never hidden from unpleasant, mundane or ordinary spaces, He walks right into those situations with us. This is what the incarnation means, that God has taken on flesh in all of its ordinariness.

Embrace your ordinary day:

- ➢ Notice how God is speaking to you through everyday circumstances.
- ➢ Pay attention to living parables - stories in your life that reveal what is going on on a deeper level.
- ➢ Plan life-giving things to do everyday.
- ➢ Listen for God's voice in conversations you are in or around.
- ➢ Celebrate the Eucharist/Lord's supper.

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for this season of Advent. Make us aware of you in the mundane tasks of life. Forgive us for missing You in the ordinary while we are chasing after the extraordinary. Reveal yourself to us in the present moment. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
Journey from the East to West:
Becoming Aware of Jesus in Diversity

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-2

> "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Question

How are you welcoming the stranger in this season of your life?

Silence

Let us be silent for one minute together.

Devotional

The wise men leave the comfort of their homes to encounter the king of the Jews. The star leads them to a home with a young mom and her toddler son. Mary must have been surprised when she opened her door to greet these guys!

What are those spaces in which we need to stretch out of our comfort zone and find a greater revelation of Jesus? People who look and act differently from us actually carry the treasure of revealing Christ more fully to us. God says that we are all His image-bearers, so we all reveal a bit of who God is

Embrace a little diversity:

- ➢ Go somewhere in which you are the minority.
- ➢ Read books by authors from different backgrounds, cultures or political beliefs.
- ➢ Ask God to reveal to you any group of people that you may have judgments against (this could include someone from a different economic background, opposite gender, different political party or nationality).
- ➢ Become aware of any tendencies to only hang out with the worship band, your family or close friends. Make a conscious effort to stretch out and initiate with those around you who are not in your circle of friends.
- ➢ Look for God to speak to you in nature like He spoke to the magi.
- ➢ Listen for God in your everyday life: dreams, circumstances, and through others.
- ➢ Ask for others to pray for you for any areas of unforgiveness of a different gender, people group, age group or ethnicity

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for this season of Advent. You are the Creator of all. Every person we encounter today bears your image. Forgive us for choosing not to see You in those who are different from us. Bring freedom to us in areas where we have been judgmental and unforgiving. Give us your eyes to see all creation as You see it. Amen.