

# 12.8.2024 Sermon

## Discovering Advent

### **SPEAKERS**

**Rev. Sandra Anderson**

So, we are in Advent season. I didn't even really know what Advent was until I got to Cornerstone. So, I was just as silent as you when I heard that. I was now in the Advent series.

This Advent sermon series is kind of wracking my brain. So, if you are really looking for a good understanding of Advent, come next Sunday... Kevin is going to be giving us a good understanding of Advent as a crash course in the Greek and Hebrew. So, do not expect any of that today.

All I got is my thoughts, and sometimes they go on a wild ride. So, this is my thoughts, my understanding, so you do not have to adapt them at all, and it's probably best that you do not. But we're going to go on a journey. Since I did not really know much about Advent, I didn't grow up on Advent, I asked Google to help me because Pastor Tracy would not. So, I said, Google, tell me what I'm supposed to be talking about. Some of the things that Google told me about how to celebrate Christ during the holidays were this:

First, it told me to attend church. And I was like, check, I do that all the time, all the time. So, there's nothing for me, unless you just don't regularly attend, then that's something you can put on your list to do. But I'm here all the time, so that does not apply to me.

Read Bible stories about the birth of Christ. Check, yeah, I can do that. Sing hymns, I guess, like since it's December, we should be singing songs like today, you know, all the Christmas songs. So, check, we did that this morning, so we are good on that.

Participate in Advent traditions. What I've seen lately is the 25 days of gifts. Somebody told me that Advent was like the 25 moments of pause and stuff, but I've really seen like 25 days of Legos, 25 days of perfume and candy. So, if that's your thing, I think that's acceptable too. So however, you want to do your 25 days, I think that's acceptable. So, I have been giving myself 25 days of gifts. So, check on that too.

Decorate my home with religious symbols. I guess that means the nativity scene because that's the only thing I really see, and the words love, joy, peace, and hope.

Does that cover all the holy symbols for the season? I think we got gratitude, so we have checked that box too. I know Kevin has a nativity scene. He talked about it in one of his Advent sermons. So, we have covered religious things as well, decorations.

And it said incorporate acts of giving and service. So, oh, by the way, if you owe Char those Angel Tree gifts, they were due today, so I hope y'all brought them. So that is an act that you can do for incorporating acts of gifts. And usually, if you go to the grocery store around this season, you will see the Salvation Army ringing a bell. You can do things like that, or you can just give to a non-profit like us, and that is a good way to encourage acts of giving and service. So, check on that too.

So, after I read that, I was like, I exceeded all my expectations. So, I am doing good on Advent. How did you guys score?

Everybody? Like, I'm like, what is the difference if we do this all the time? Then what is so special about doing it in December? So, then I went back to, okay, something's not right. Because I do this all the time, so it has to be something that I'm missing. That's why I kept spinning around in circles. So, I'm like, what is Christmas all about? What is Advent all about? Because I felt like I was missing something. Because if I do this all the time, why? What? What am I missing in December?

Then I started going down this religious hole of like, oh, maybe I've heard Jesus is the reason for the season, and I'm like, maybe that's what I'm missing. I gotta make Jesus the reason for the season.

Has anybody figured out how to do that?

Like, how do you make Jesus? How do you show somebody that I am actively making Jesus the reason for the season without feeling like I'm just doing worldly things, as people would say, what does that look like?

Help me. Help you figure out. What does that look like? See, this is discovery. Dana asked me, what was my topic, and I said, I don't know, let's discover Advent, because I have no answers for you. So, discover that for yourself because I'm not going to give you any answers.

I told you that type of sermon.

Bless you.

I felt like we have made Christmas overrated yet underrated. Sometimes, I guess a little overrated, if we want to say, like we said, There's only the nativity scene. There's not so much religious stuff that we do. So, I go to the mall and I see Santa Claus. And I thought maybe, just maybe, we can get a nativity scene in the middle of the mall, and we can have pictures with baby Jesus, and we can send them out as

greeting cards. That would give us an idea of Jesus is the reason for the season, instead of Santa Claus.

Cornerstone is going to have a nativity scene set up in the middle of the mall, and everybody can come take pictures, and we will be holy for the season.

Check.

But is it that serious? Do we have to go down the religious mindset of, "Am I going to church? Am I giving? Is this the only time that we can give during Christmas?" Why can't it be something we do all the time? Is this the only time that we can meet up with family? Yes, for some of us, yes.

Is this the only time we want to gather with co-workers? Yes.

Definitely at my job. Yes, we would never gather. So, if this is the time where you can gather and have parties, I really enjoy this season because I get a couple of days off. And even if they don't give them, I take them. So, it is rest. The children get school off. So, whatever you find in this season that makes you feel connected to God, it's okay. It doesn't have to be. You can't put up your Christmas tree. You can't.

And actually, when I thought of a Christmas tree, Terry, I was like, everybody gets to love trees. Terry is going to be so excited about this.

Everybody is going to have a tree and talk about their tree because Terry loves trees. That will make Terry happy if everybody texts her a picture of their Christmas tree.

See, connecting. That's what God wants from you.

My thoughts.

Yeah, and then I started thinking about everything. It just started bothering me. Like, I would hear Christmas songs, and I usually love this season, so I can hear Christmas songs. And I literally stopped listening to Christmas songs because it was like, "Joy to the World, Merry Christmas." And some stuff just wasn't making sense to me.

Me, like, even when I think of the nativity scene, I'm like, "Oh, look at this." And I think of peace and the baby that doesn't cry, and I'm like, really? Really? Jesus didn't cry? Or we paint this picture, and we tend to do this in our own life, especially at Christmas time, of painting this picture like everything is good. But life don't stop because of the holidays.

The bills still bill.

The people at your work are still working.

Family still family.

The government is still the government. Like, it doesn't stop because it's the holidays. But everybody is saying, and another thing, I'm from the South, up north. I ain't never seen no northern people so happy. They actually speak and say, "Merry Christmas," "Happy New Year," "Happy Holidays." And I'm like, "Y'all don't speak no other time." But it's something about this season that makes the northern people approachable. I love to see it. I love to see it. So, if that's what it takes, thank you, God, because He has a way of making ways out of no way. So, I love to see it. So, if that's what it takes, then say "Merry Christmas," or somebody say "Happy Holidays." But sometimes also keep in mind that somebody ain't like... Brittany told me this morning, "Good morning." And I said, "Ain't no good morning for me."

Like, sometimes we can be real and say, it's not a good season for me. You may be happy, you may enjoy looking forward to going home to your family, but for some people, they may not have a family. They may not get along with their family. So, while one side is happy, some other people are still sad and broken. So how do we hold the both-and in this season? How do we still pause and see people in this season, that it's not so much as pushing our joy and happiness? I got a problem with the people that want to be happy. But for some, for me, it was like going to a funeral and somebody telling me, "Oh, they're in a better place." I don't want to hear it. So sometimes, it's just... now, this is just me... sometimes I just don't want to hear it. So, take it however you see it, but understand, for some people, it's not that. So, meet them where they are. If when you say "Merry Christmas" and they look like it ain't merry, don't just say, "Well, I don't know why you ain't happy." Embrace. That's where they are.

Then I thought, it's like, like we say "Happy birthday," I said, it's Jesus' birthday. We gotta do something for Jesus. We do something for your birthday. What can we do for Jesus? And I thought about it, and I said, you know what? Sometimes we come to the birthday party, church, and it's like, imagine going to somebody's birthday party and you want them to give you something. Now, I spend cake and ice cream at a party, but it's like we come in and we're like, give me, feed me, sing for me, do this for me. And what are we bringing to the party?

Some of us go to parties, like sometimes I go to my nephew's party, and I'm really not there for them. I'm there to see other people because other people want to see me. So, if we're coming to see Jesus at his party, and it's written about him, are we really here to have social hour for everybody else, and forget about the birthday boy?

So, don't just come into the season with your hands open. What can somebody give me? What can God give me? But what are we bringing to others? What are we bringing to God in this season? Gifts are okay.

I don't really like to receive gifts, but if you give me one, I'm not going to be opposed to it.

So, if gifts are your thing, then do it. If it makes you happy to see other people happy, then do it. It's not a right or wrong way to celebrate this season. Another thing they told me when they were talking about reading the Christmas story, I kind of got a little discouraged because when I read Matthew and Luke on the Christmas story, well, the birth of Jesus, I was like, you can't read one without the other. I don't know if they were friends. Why couldn't they just get together and make me one story so I can... because some of the people are in the Tim.

The scene in one chapter and some of the people are in the other. So, if you read one without the other, you kind of get confused on how the wise men got there. So, if you're gonna read them, you gotta read them both. At first, I'm like, we usually do it as traditions. We read it with hot chocolate around with the family. And it's like we just zoom past it, and we're like, "Oh, that's a great story." And then I start reading, and I'm like, "Whoa." Like, what are you trying to tell me? Now this is just my thoughts. When I thought of Mary, I was like, wow, how can I get to a point like Mary?

Because she had some type of faith. Like, if you don't know the story, the angel comes to her, and he's like, hey, the Lord has found favor in you. I would have been like, "Yes! Who doesn't want to find favor with God?" I was like, "Yes, I can agree. Good job, Mary." Next. Then he's like, you're going to have a baby. And Mary is like, thinking about being a virgin, and my mom went, like, I would have been like, "Okay, I'm already engaged. Like, that can't happen." So, I would have been thinking like, future. I would have been thinking like, he meant, like, time now. So, Mary's like, "How can this happen?" And he like, tells her how it's gonna happen. And Mary's response was just like, "Okay. Let it be your will."

God's still working on me. Because if He told me right now, "Hey, He's gonna give me a baby," I would be like, "Hey, the way my work schedule is set up and I have to drive back and forth to Staten Island, I can't be having no baby at seven o'clock when I get in and going to bed at night. Like, how is it going to work?" So, I would have a million questions, and I'm trying to get like Mary, but low-key, I don't want to be like Mary because she didn't ask any questions. I think it's okay to ask questions.

And if y'all have arrived at the "no questions" stage, when Jesus gives you something, you just say, "Yes."

Okay, so y'all with me? So, I don't feel bad. I was concerned about that because I thought you guys had arrived, and I have not. So...

That was I was concerned because, you know, you get around church people, they are perfect. And I want you to know that in this season, you don't have to be perfect.

So, I think God would still accept me with my questions. Then I saw and then Mary, it was like an arranged marriage. And I'm like, can you imagine that? Can you imagine somebody telling me, so I don't draw that?

I can see my family now. Like, here's the young man we have.

I would not be a good married person. It would be problems from the beginning. I would be like, nope, not going to happen.

So, there's a lot for us to discover during Advent. I'm still figuring it out.

So, yeah, it would have been a lot of problems. Yeah, so, but in that, don't be like me, that you have so many questions and stuff, that God just move to the next person, because I would have been a complainer. I wouldn't fault God if he just moved to the next person, because I would have had questions. And, you know, so to me, being in an arranged marriage, then you giving me a baby, and I had plans to, like, try to like this man first, before you bring a baby into the situation, like, it's a lot that would have been going on in my mind. Then they want us to walk or ride a donkey. We don't know which one they did. So, like, it's like me trying to go back to Alabama, walking or on a donkey because the government wants to do a census. I would be like, "No. Like, you go, I'm gonna be here." So, like, it would have been like a bunch of rebellions.

So, like I said, this is my story. This is how I process when I read the Bible. So, don't read the Bible with me, but I'm like, I give it to Mary. I give it to her. So, when you read the Scripture, you don't see all that behind the scene. You just see Mary, like, "Yes," and you're like, "Oh my God. Like, yes, great." And I'm like, "No, I'm real." When that happened for me. Then Joseph, they give his story, and he was real. He was like, "Yeah, no, I'll divorce her quietly, not for me." And then, like, the angel had to come and be like, "No, like, for real, like she's not lying. Take her as your wife." And he's like, "Okay." And I'm like, "Okay, you ain't got no more questions?" So, like, to me, imagine a road trip with somebody that you really don't know, and now you got a baby that you say God gave you, and I'm trying to believe it, but the Bible wants me to believe that it never came across his mind, like I would just be watching you on a donkey. And like, you didn't hear that, or did your brother walk in at a robe and pretend to be God? Did I hear it, but I don't know?

And then me being a step-parent, like, I don't know how he could have, like, raised baby Jesus. I'm like, how you raise your God? What can you tell him? Like, and if Jesus, like, you notice that in the Bible, in the birth of Jesus, it just skips to like, now he's like, a pre-teen or younger. We don't see that in between stage, so we don't know what Jesus was doing, but he was human, so I assume he was doing what children do. But like, how you be like, "Okay, you get a whipping, or you get no punishment," and you be like, "Oh, shoot, like, your real daddy is God." Like, can I really give you a whipping? Or is he gonna punish me for whipping you because you

out of line? Like, how does that work? So, I would be over-processing everything that I would just probably let him do what he wants to do, because I'd be like, I don't want nothing to happen to me. So, if that's what you want him to do, you see him, but I would do nothing because I would want to be right with my Lord.

So, that would be a struggle for me, because I would be silently suffering because I'm like, I have no control of this child. This child is really my God. So how does this work? Should I be teaching him, or should he be teaching me? But right now, he's saying Google Gaga. So, there's something in the Google Gaga that I should be comprehending, because I'm really like, it would just be confusing for me. So, that's why you don't read about it with me. So, that's the rabbit hole that I went down.

So, reading the Christmas, the birth of Jesus, it just wouldn't, it was getting reality to me, where any other time I would have just read it and been like, "Oh, I read it, check mark," because it's part of the Advent that they said. So, it would have been like, check mark. But this story was making me really think. And I was like, "Oh," and Mary, when she had the baby, once she didn't have her family there. I'm like, "Who does that?" And I'm with this man that I don't really know, so he probably didn't know how to help her deliver this baby. She ain't got no epidural. And we were out here smelling these animals like, I don't like going to the field, and I'm in the army, so I know I would not have liked that situation of being there with them animals. But the baby Jesus was silent. That's what the hymn says, ain't it? He was all this calm, all his bright. He doesn't cry, little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes. So, at least the baby wasn't crying.

But I would probably still be mad. So, when they took the picture for the nativity scene, instead of the picture that y'all see, I would be like this:

"What is really happening, and why y'all bringing him here? Where's my push present? Like, I pushed, where's the push present for me? I'm the one who said yes."

And then, like, y'all don't understand, like, to even accept yes, she could have got stoned. So, it's like, I don't know what Mary just really thought about her yes. And then when she said yes, she was like, "Oh, shoot. Like, I am engaged." So, like, can you imagine going to your parents? Some of them, "Yeah, Jesus, the Lord has given me a baby." And you're like, man, these people didn't pay for you, like, and now you're spoiled. Like, and I gotta explain to their family that somehow God has impregnated you, which has never been done. Imagine the chaos in her family that we don't read about. Like, that's the part that I be wanting to know, because it's like so many missing parts that I need to know, like, what happened?

Because if I'm gonna believe this word, like, I need to know that it's not just a great story. I need to know that the problems that I deal with were the same problems that they would deal with. But we speed past it and just sum it up, and we present this

picture like, "Just say yes, and everything is gonna be all right." But no, when things aren't right and things aren't going as planned, we don't want to talk about that. So, it helps me to give you guys the real on how I imagine it to be. It ain't probably all true, but there was some chaos, there was some confusion, there was some scandal, and I'm pretty sure Joseph's parents weren't like, "Yes, we love Mary. Who cares? It's gotta be God's sign." Like, yeah, no. Like, no. So, it's okay to be real in this season. It's okay to not be happy, or if you got chaos, it's okay. You don't have to pretend. You don't have to come in with your family like the nativity scene and everybody's like, "We are good." What Dana say? "Everything's fine, it's fine, everything's fine."

It's okay to not be fine. So, in this busyness of this season, if everything is not fine, don't get caught up in the holidays or people just pushing cheer. If you're feeling sadness, it's okay. If you're feeling everything else, it's okay. The world doesn't stop because of this season. And what I loved is just even this week, Joni sent me this. And if I could sum up what I felt God wanted us to hear today, it would be this spoken word.

Because John, he doesn't give us a birth of Jesus like Matthew and Luke. He just says, "In the beginning was the Word." That was his idea of the birth of Jesus. That He was in the beginning, and regardless of what goes on in the middle, He is the final Amen. And I love when she said that you aren't just there in the future or past abandoning us in this vastness of the in-between while we wait for the Lord to come back. It's this in-between of like, "What are we doing? Have you abandoned us?" It's the Emmanuel God with us that constantly today, I heard "God with us."

So, if you got nothing else, understand that whatever you are in this vastness, God is with you. That's why He loved us so much, that He became all this. He became human. And I was thinking, a lot of times, people don't understand what it feels like to be in your shoes until they're in your shoes. It's okay for me to say, "I don't know how you do this." Or, "I don't know why she's having a struggle." Being a single parent, I do it, yeah, but you may have a support system, or you may have whatever, like, we don't put ourselves in each other's shoes. And what I love about God is maybe He was sitting around like, "Why do they not get it?" And He's like, "You know what? I can't just say. I don't know why they doing it."

He loved us so much that He became us to fully understand what it feels like to be us. That He was betrayed, He was talked about. He had chaos. He had a chaotic family. He didn't grow up, God could've just dropped Him down in a warrior family, or just dropped Him down in a pillow, a cloud or something, and made it on a royal entrance. But He brought Him down like us, where we can relate, and He's like everything that you can possibly go through and deal with. He's like, "I became you so that I can fully understand you and not just say, 'Yeah, you should be able to do this.'" He's like, "No, I've been there. I've even asked God myself, like, 'Why have you forsaken me?'" So, He understands when life is life, and then we're like, "Where are you?" He's not just a god sitting high looking down on us like, "It's easy, do it."



Why are you crying about what you're doing?" He's like, "I'm right there with you in this pain, and I'm not just sitting far off saying, 'I don't know why it's so hard for you to just get out of bed today.'" He understands, and He's with you.

The name is peace. This is what I did learn from Advent. Now I did do this part. This is supposed to be a week of peace. So, if you are actually following along with the Advent, don't say I did not tell you. This was the week of peace. And the Lord came to be the Prince of Peace. So, if you got chaos in this season, if everything around you is just a whirlwind in this moment, in this week, remember the God that holds peace. Sometimes people say, "I don't even know how you look or act the way you do, knowing what you've been through." That's that peace that surpasses all understanding, that sometimes I don't even know how I'm still rolling, but that's that, not this, "Oh yeah, everything's calm." No, that's that, I guess, what we see in the nativity scene where everything's supposed to be calm and we're like, "But it's not that." Either way, God is still there to bring us peace, even when things aren't going the way we think it needs to be.

And the God who sees me. Joe walked up to me today, and he's like, "What's going on with you?" And I'm like, "I'm good." And he's like, "How's your good?" And I've been battling a diverticulitis flare-up, but you would never know it. And I said, "Thank you for seeing me." Because we have a God. And I said, "I wasn't going to cry, don't I messed that one up." We have a God that sees us, even when it's something small like that, that you don't just walk about in a room and feel like, "God, nobody sees me." That even in that, that's what this Advent season is for me. It's when you see somebody be a replica of what God has been to you to somebody else. See somebody be with somebody.

If you can give, give to somebody. If you can help, help somebody. If you can be light, be light to somebody. Be all the things that God is to you to somebody else in this season. That's the best gift that we can be, is to be a willing vessel. To say, "What do you want from me in this season?" And if it's to show up at the party, you never know who you can talk to at the party.

If it's to hang up some lights, you don't know who's driving by, and that light is the streetlight that's actually keeping them from running off the road. Why you think it's just, "I'm putting up Christmas lights?" When you put out your nativity scene set in the driveway, you don't know who's driving by to say, "Huh, somebody else loves my God like me." So, whatever you do in this season, you don't have to be so holy. Meet God however you meet Him, like the wise men. God used a medium that was for them. If worship is your thing, if singing is your thing, whatever it is, if just this season of being happy and full of joy is your thing, that this is the only time of the year that you're in a good mood, let that be your vein this season.

Say, "Hey, January, don't talk to me, but this month, you gonna get the best joy out of me that you can get." So be that in this season.

