

A RESURRECTION DIGITAL ADVENT STUDY

honest advent



*Awakening to the Wonder of God-with-Us
Then, Here, and Now*

BY SCOTT ERICKSON

Welcome to Honest Advent! We are excited to share this digital resource with you. This study is designed to help you connect with the Christmas story “between the noise, the pressure, and the picture perfect” busyness of everything else going on. Based on Scott Erickson’s book, *Honest Advent: Awakening to the Wonder of God-with-us, Then, Here, and Now*, it’s a digital resource you can take with you anywhere you go or you can use the study guide in your small group to encounter Christ and experience Advent in a meaningful way.

In this four-week journey we hope you discover the God who showed up in the hardest parts of humanity thousands of years ago and who still shows up today.

Episode 1: Annunciation

Introduction

For Mary, who would become the mother of Jesus, the annunciation was a life-changing moment. It was for her to-be-husband, Joseph, as well. In the announcement that Mary would give birth to a baby named Jesus, who would be the savior of the world, life was upended. The announcement led to vulnerability and a transformation that changes everything. But here's the thing, when we receive this kind of announcement—a revelation of sorts—we're not really in charge of what happens. Our best-laid plans are disrupted as we enter into God's story.

Three Questions for Reflection:

What about the Advent season sparks wonder for you? What about the Advent season invites honest reflection for you?

As you encounter the Christmas story, what does this vulnerability look like for the characters in the story; and for you?

Do you resonate with Scott Erickson's statement "The brand of Christmas had traded its honest edge with sanitized characters in a never-ending winter scene." What might make this story come alive for you?

Two Key Insights:

Scott Erickson wrote, "All great stories come at a cost, and the cost of revelation is that it's going to ask something of us. In any divine annunciation, you receive revelation as a gift, yet at the same time you receive notice that all that you had planned is ending. It's all over. Everything will change—most of all you."

Scott Erickson also wrote, “[One] who is willing to accept the cost of revelation finds themselves in the deepest of stories. Stories that are so mysterious, divine, and human that we still tell them today.”

What transformation—
born of an annunciation—
is God inviting you into
today?

One Practice

We often use words as a way to connect with ideas, but it’s important to offer imagery as well. Spend a minute with the image created by Scott Erickson. Let it excavate you. A great question to ask, “What does this mean?” An even better question is, “What is this pulling out of me?” Art has that glorious excavating quality, so don’t miss out.



Closing Reflection

Offer this prayer to God: “Lord, help me receive the light of divine annunciation in the flames of my best-laid plans.”

Episode 2: Assumptions

Introduction

We all make assumptions, don't we? Christmas comes with a lot of assumptions. There are assumptions made about the Christmas story, about our lives, and about others. Often, our assumptions hinder our spiritual journey in all kinds of ways. So, what's the antidote?

Three Questions for Reflection:

What is the biggest assumption you've ever made (about someone or something or yourself)?

What assumptions about faith, God, and life have you thankfully found to be untrue?

Why is it that Mary seemed surprised that God had chosen her?
What does her response teach you about how to respond to God?

Two Key Insights:

Scott Erickson wrote, "Spirituality also comes with many assumptions, and the ones that fail us are the ones we make about what it's supposed to look like, who is worthy for it to happen to, and what kind of outcome it's supposed to have for us."

He also wrote, "Our assumptions hinder our spiritual journey in all kinds of ways, and the antidote to assumption is surprise. The surprise of Christ's incarnation is that it happened in Mary's day, it also happens in your humble surroundings."

How does surprise happen to you in your life, the kind of surprise that pushes back your assumptions?

One Practice

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Closing Reflection

Offer this prayer to God:
"May you thank God with joyful surprise at how much you have assumed incorrectly."



Episode 3: Visible

Introduction

What does it mean to be made visible, or to become seen? The desire for authenticity, and the ability to be our true selves is nearly universal. We all want to be seen, and yet, to be known, seen, visible—it can be risky. Part of what it means for Jesus to come to us at Christmas, both as a baby who becomes a man and as God’s own son (human and divine)—it’s God saying to us, humans, I see you and I love you.

Three Questions for Reflection:

Have you ever had a moment where you wished God would just tell you what to do?

How do you see the two spiritualities play out in your life—one that tells us we must earn love, and the other that reminds us we receive love?

How does the incarnation—God made human through Jesus—enable you to be your authentic self?

Two Key Insights:

Scott Erickson wrote, “There is a spirituality that operates out of the belief that one flourishes by earning love. That if I do this—but mostly focus on don’t doing that!—*then* I’ll be loved. I’m in the club! Until I mess up, and then I’m out of the club! And then we go back and forth, back and forth. Also, unfortunately, this happens pretty much every day...so my membership is constantly in question. It’s a very anxious spirituality to have.”

He also wrote, “There’s another spirituality based on the notion that it’s actually not through earning but through receiving that one

flourishes. We cannot earn God’s love. We cannot earn the love of others—even if we try. There’s a different kind of love that is deeper than any well—an eternal source.”

Think of a time when you were anchored in the well-spring or rooted like a tree you that led you to feel God’s empowering spirit to do something beyond yourself. How did your faith grow?

One Practice

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Closing Reflection

Offer this prayer to God: “May you be reminded that by being seen and known, you are acknowledging the deep wellspring within that God has created uniquely inside each of us.”

Episode 4: Attention

Introduction

Today, we really begin to prepare for Christmas—there's an invitation to attention. Said another way, to pay attention. Like the Magi searching for a star to begin their travel, they paid attention to their surroundings and understood something bigger was happening. And still, so much of our faith journey invites us to move from observation to full participation—of our minds, bodies, and spirits.

Three Questions for Reflection:

What is the difference between observing and actively participating in your faith?

Have you had an experience of paying attention and feeling God pulling you in a new direction, like the Magi?

How have the things of our material world, like the stars or the universe, tried to get your attention—what did you do about it?

Two Key Insights:

Scott Erickson wrote, “There's a difference between reading books about life and the actual risk and reward of living a life of travel, valor, love, and service. There is a deep knowing that can only be attained through participation.”

He also wrote, “We may not be asked to travel hundreds of miles to experience the presence of a newborn king, but the stars leading you to a deeper knowledge of God may be just as mysterious now as they were back then. The wonder in God-with-Us is found in paying attention to the exterior patterns that illuminate the patterns within. If you are watching, you'll see them. Then you too will be asked to

move from observation to participation in the ancient journey of knowing the Divine.”

What is God asking you to pay attention to today—about yourself and others—and what steps do you need to take to faithfully journey to the wonder of God-with-us?

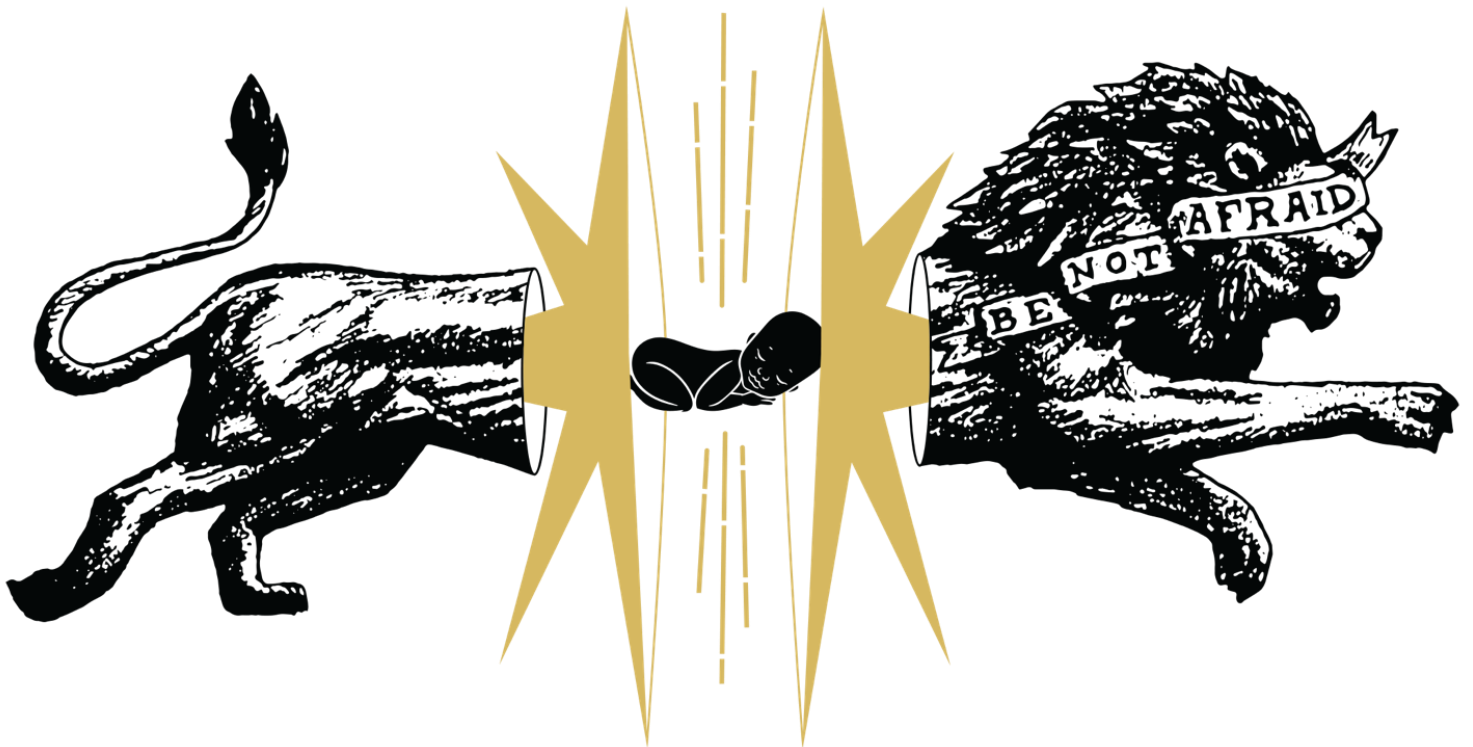
One Practice

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Closing Reflection

Offer this prayer to God: May you keep paying attention to what the outside illuminates inside. One final note! Keep a look out in your inbox or on the website for a special bonus episode just after Christmas.



For additional discipleship opportunities, visit resurrection.church/discipleship

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