

# THE WONDER OF IT ALL



**MARK SORENSEN** A Daily Advent Reader



# THE WONDER OF IT ALL

A Daily Advent Reader

**MARK SORENSEN**



Copyright 2024 by Mark Sorensen

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture quotations 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.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked THE MESSAGE are taken THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*Cover design and layout by Nick Perreault  
Page layout by PerfecType, Nashville, Tennessee*

Sorensen, Mark

The wonder of it all : a daily Advent reader / Mark Sorensen. – Franklin, Tennessee : Seedbed Publishing, ©2024.

pages ; cm. + 1 video disc

ISBN: 9798888000830 (paperback)

ISBN: 9798888000861 (DVD)

ISBN: 9798888000847 (epub)

ISBN: 9798888000854 (updf)

OCLC: 1438789536

1. Advent--Meditations. 2. Advent--Prayers and devotions. 3. Devotional calendars. I. Title.

BV40.S67 2024

242/.33

2024941266



SEEDBED PUBLISHING  
Franklin, Tennessee  
seedbed.com

# CONTENTS

Introduction: Wonder-Filled	xi
1. Ponder This	3
2. Kids Get It	6
3. The Wonder in the Waiting	10
4. I Doubt It	15
5. A Super-Spreader Event	19
6. Sing Out Loud, Sing Out Strong	23
7. Origin Story	28
8. The Wonder in the Watching	32
9. Angel Greetings 101	37
10. Potholes to Gardens	42
11. Patience in the Developing	46
12. Synchronized Heartbeats	50
13. Stressors	54
14. Deep Darkness and a Great Light	60
15. The Wonder in the Searching	65

16.	Light Will Guide You Home	69
17.	Herod the (Not So) Great	73
18.	GPS: God's Positioning System	78
19.	The Wonder in the Working	83
20.	Drop the Blanket	88
21.	Big Things, Little Package	92
22.	Here's Your Sign	97
23.	Worth the Wait	101
24.	Hearers, Believers, and Preachers	106
25.	It Is God's Dark	109

# INTRODUCTION

## WONDER-FILLED

won·der

/'wʌndər/

*noun*

*A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable.*

Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you felt *that*? Really. Take a moment and try to identify the last time that you were caught, unexpectedly, in a place of wonder.

Now, I should probably clarify. I'm not talking about the kind of wonder that seeks to answer life's great mysteries like why we drive on parkways and park on driveways. (I'm still waiting on the answer for that one, by the way.) I'm also not talking about the type of wonder where there's just a pinch of doubt mixed into whatever question you're pondering.

When I speak of wonder, I am talking about true, unbridled, uninhibited, straight-out, slack-jawed awe and wonder. Can you identify a recent moment in time

when you encountered something that was so beautiful, so unexpected, so unfamiliar and incomprehensible, that it literally rendered you . . . speechless?

As I type this Advent devotional, my wife and I are babysitting our grandbaby. Simon is the first grandchild for us, and everything they say about grandparenting being the greatest thing ever, by the way, is 100-percent true. It's beyond description.

An observation about this little guy? From the moment his blue eyes came into focus, he has been all about awe and wonder. He's currently seven months old and this holiday season we've noticed that his face lights up with everything he lays his little eyes on. Literally, *everything*. Right now, he's staring at the lights on our Christmas tree while simultaneously sticking the head of a Fisher Price nativity playset character into his mouth. We're calling Simon's name, but he doesn't seem to care. Simply because he's too busy being distracted and captivated by the *wonder* of what's directly in front of him.

Perhaps it's time to rediscover the wonder found within the Advent story. What I am learning, it's not just a wonderful story, it's a wonder-*filled* story.

In the pages that follow, let's seek to rediscover the wonder found in this liturgical season of the church called Advent.

# I

## PONDER THIS

### **LUKE 2:19**

*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

### **CONSIDER THIS**

I wish I could tell you that at an early age I was awestruck by the Christmas story. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't absent from our family tradition. In fact, from as far back as I can remember, the very first decoration that officially kicked off the holiday decor in the Sorensen family living room was our porcelain nativity set, prominently placed on top of the family piano the day after Thanksgiving. It was tradition in our house. However, it wasn't that nativity set and story that brought out my wonder; it was something completely different: the *Sears Wish Book*.

Now, I realize I may be dating myself, but back in the archaic pre-nearly-instant-delivery days of the early eighties, this little catalog was like the Holy Grail to me. As soon as it arrived in the mailbox, it never hit my parents' hands. I would carry it back to my room, sit on my bed, and slowly, page by page, take in every toy,

every detail, and make meticulous notations on what I wanted to see under the tree. I was so obsessed with that catalog that one year I ripped out pages and hand-delivered them to Santa at the mall. “Hey, Santa, made it easy for you this year. Here you go! Circled, highlighted, and prioritized. Merry Christmas!”

Then came the waiting. I absolutely *loved* the anticipation of what might be sitting under that Christmas tree on December 25.

However, as I got older, the anticipation of what was under that tree on Christmas morning grew fainter and fainter. The toys lost their interest in my life and, before long, the Star Wars action figures, Legos, and Tinkertoys turned into much less exciting gifts like socks and underwear. Necessary, but no instructions needed.

And then, one year, married with my own children, we were visiting my parents and my mom pointed to a gift that was waiting for me to open under the tree. Taking the box and ripping off the paper, I was shocked to find what was waiting inside: it was the family nativity set that, as a child, we would put out together on the piano every year. What followed became our own tradition of putting out the nativity set with our own children.

I've learned to truly treasure this Advent story.

How about you?

On the other side of shepherds watching over their flock by night and angels declaring “good news of great

joy . . . for all the people,” Luke records that Mary “treasured up all these things” (Luke 2:8, 10, 19 ESV).

On the other side of angelic announcements, shepherds, and supposedly that cute little drummer boy who just knew the best gift to offer her was a drum solo after her delivery, Mary “pondered them in her heart.”

To treasure is to store up and hold onto something of priceless value. That’s the story we’re stepping into together in the weeks ahead.

So, before the wondering, perhaps a fitting place to begin our Advent journey is to ponder the treasures found for us all in this nativity story of good news!

### **THE PRAYER**

Father, we thank you for the treasure found for us all within the Christmas story. Today, open our eyes to see your presence, and our ears to hear your voice at work within our own lives and stories. In the mighty name of Jesus we pray, amen.

### **THE QUESTIONS**

Take a look at your own nativity set that you may have or look at many of the nativity scenes you can find online or around your community. Look at each character found in the nativity scene. Who holds one of your favorite stories and why?

## 2

# KIDS GET IT

### **MARK 10:13–16**

*People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

### **CONSIDER THIS**

I love the story of the mother who took her five-year-old boy with her to the small, locally owned grocery store in town. She had finished getting the groceries and went up to the counter to check out. Conveniently placed next to the register was a jar full of the most colorful pieces of hard candy you could have ever imagined.

The owner of the store who happened to be running the register that day saw the little boy staring at that jar of candies with wide-eyed wonder. Feeling a spirit of generosity, the owner asked the boy, “Would you like to reach in and grab some candy for free today?”

The boy didn't answer. He just stood there.

Pushing further, the owner replied, "Go ahead. I don't mind. Reach in! Get some candy! It's on me today."

Still, the young boy said nothing.

At a loss for what to do next, the owner asked the boy if it would be okay if *he* got some candy out for him.

With that, the little boy suddenly came alive, smiled, and said, "Please, and thank you, sir!"

The man reached in, grabbed a good-sized handful of candy, and filled the little boy's hands.

Walking out of the store, the mother was curious and asked her son, "Honey, when the nice man asked you to grab some candy out of the jar, why didn't you answer him? He asked you two different times to stick your hand in there and get some candy and you didn't move."

Without missing a beat, the boy got a huge smile on his face and replied, "Mom, did you *see* the size of his hands?"

Smart kid.

God has more wonder in his hands than we can ever realize. The question is: Are our hands ready to receive all that he has prepared to pour over us?

This brings to mind a story found in Mark's gospel, where a group of children crashed a grown-up Bible study.

Imagine the setting. Jesus was teaching, another large crowd had gathered, and the disciples were feeling like rock stars. James and John were shoulder-to-shoulder

eying the crowd. Matthew was tediously taking notes on the teaching when, suddenly, Peter's eyes darted over to a group of kids and parents pushing through the crowd and heading straight to Jesus. *No problem*, Peter thought. *I can handle this*. Jumping into action, Peter blocked the kids and parents and quietly moved them toward the back of the crowd because, well, Jesus hadn't even gotten to the third point of that day's teaching. "Sorry, kids. Go and play somewhere else. There's serious grown-up business happening here," Peter said.

That's when it happened: Peter heard his name. I imagine that he stopped and turned around to see the crowd was now looking at *him*, caught red-handed as he was moving the kids out of the circle where the adults had gathered.

Mark records that in this moment Jesus was "indignant" (Mark 10:14a). You don't hear that word often in Scripture, by the way. In the Greek, it means to feel a violent irritation. Clearly, something is happening in the moment that we should take note of. What followed was a rebuke from Jesus: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." In fact, he went on to say, "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (vv. 14b-15). Then he took the children in his arms and blessed them.

Let's not miss this moment. To a group of adults, Jesus used children to show the way we're all called to enter into the presence of God. We're to enter it like a little child, hands open, ready to receive all the wonder that comes from the Father.

Today's reminder: the kingdom of God exists for kingdom children.

### **THE PRAYER**

God of wonder, we thank you for the gift of childlike faith. It's all too easy to live our lives with clenched fists, holding on to control. Today, may we loosen the grip. May we open our hands to receive the wonder you want to freely pour over us all. In Jesus's mighty name we pray, amen.

### **THE QUESTIONS**

What does childlike wonder mean to you?

What do children possess that adults have lost?

What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God like a little child, and where might we be missing the kingdom of God because we've grown a little too old?

# 3

## THE WONDER IN THE WAITING

### **LUKE 1:5–13**

*In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.*

*Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.*

*Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son and you are to call him John."*

## CONSIDER THIS

There's a quote I love that's attributed to Mark Twain that reads: "All good things arrive unto them that wait—and don't die in the meantime."

Let's face it. Waiting can be insufferable.

Have you ever considered how much of our lives we spend waiting? A recent poll discovered that the average person spends nearly two hours a day waiting on *something*. Maybe it's waiting for someone to respond to a text, waiting for traffic to start moving again, waiting for the web page to refresh, or waiting for the latest app to download on your phone. Whatever the waiting, that time adds up. Think about it. Almost two hours a day may not sound like a lot, but eventually the numbers stack up! That's about twelve hours of waiting a week and, over the course of a year, it's more than 624 hours spent doing one laboring, excruciating task: waiting.<sup>1</sup>

Can I be honest? I hate waiting. Personally, waiting seems like such a waste.

What if a waiting season is not a wasted season?

Luke's Christmas story begins with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Odds are, you won't find them in your nativity set (unless you've gotten *really* creative), but theirs is

---

1. John Anderer, "Average Person Loses 26 Days Each Year to Wasted Time," Study Finds, January 17, 2022, <https://studyfinds.org/loses-26-days-wasted-time/>.

a love story that plays a major role in the wonder of Christ's arrival into the world.

There is a lot of Zechariah and Elizabeth's past we don't know, but in our passage today Luke gives us three very thoughtful details that are important to note: (1) They were righteous and blameless before the Lord. "Righteous" is what the Lord sees; "blameless" is what others see. One is internal, the other is external. I think it's important to note that for the children of God today it's not one or the other, it's both/and; (2) Elizabeth was barren and they were both "very old" (v. 7). How old do you have to be to be slapped with the title "very old"? We're not exactly sure. Many commentators believe they were somewhere between the ages of sixty and seventy years old. (As I write this, I am fifty-two years old. I will gladly now be referred to as a young adult!) Whatever the age was, we know this: in her waiting season, she had been unable to conceive and give Zechariah a child; and (3) Luke reminds us that Zechariah was of the priestly division of Abijah and about to serve out his priestly duties in the temple.

That's the context.

For Zechariah, it was an ordinary day. But on this ordinary day, God had an extraordinary revelation waiting just around the corner.

As lots were cast, Zechariah's name came up and he was given the incredible opportunity to go into the

temple of the Lord and burn incense. It's believed that as many as 18,000 to 20,000 priests gathered in Jerusalem to serve various positions in the temple during a two-week period. Many served their entire lives and never got the chance that Zechariah got to enter the temple and burn incense before the Lord.

What a moment! I can imagine Zechariah's heart skipped a few beats when he saw his name drawn. However, little did Zechariah know that his heart was about to get a serious workout as, just beyond the door of the temple, an angelic encounter awaited.

As Zechariah's eyes fell on Gabriel, he heard the following words declared over him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John" (v. 13).

I wonder: How long had Zechariah been praying for he and Elizabeth to have a child? Forty years? Thirty years? Twenty? Honestly, was it even a prayer within the past ten years? Had he given up completely on the hope of ever having a child? We don't know. But we know this, it was a prayer he *had* prayed. In that moment, Gabriel declared five little words that, if we're not careful, we might completely miss in the story: *your prayer has been heard*.

Two reminders for today: (1) You may see this as an ordinary day. Look out—God may have extraordinary

moments waiting for you around the corner, and (2) the Lord hears your prayers, my friend. He knows your heart, and he loves the sound of your voice.

### **THE PRAYER**

Loving God, we thank you that, even in a waiting season, it's not a wasted season. Today, open our eyes to the truth found in your Word that our prayers are heard and, even greater, allow that truth to travel from our head to hearts.

### **THE QUESTIONS**

How are you in the waiting?

In what areas in your life are you “waiting upon the Lord”?

What might the Lord be saying to you in this season?

# 4

## I DOUBT IT

### **LUKE 1:18–20**

*Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”*

*The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”*

### **CONSIDER THIS**

Okay, let’s talk “doubt” for a moment. But before we do, I must give credit to Zechariah. He gets major brownie points in his response to Gabriel. When he learned the news that Elizabeth was going to have a baby, he brought up the fact that he’s old, and then, when faced with saying the same of his wife, he slowed down and carefully used the phrase that she’s “well along in years.”

Well played, Zechariah. Well played.

Yet something he said struck a serious chord with the angel Gabriel and it wasn't Zechariah's old-age comment. It was the words he used *before* stating the obvious: "*How can I be sure of this?*"

That, my friends, is the scent of doubt overpowering the incense of the wonder found in that moment.

How many times does our doubt literally get in the way of the wonder that God has placed in our paths?

As I write this, our doorbell just rang, and a courier left a package on our front doorstep. Apparently, my wife has ordered some baby gates that we need to put up in our home. With the gift of a grandchild in our lives comes the added bonus of making sure the house is grandbaby-proofed. It's never a bad idea to put up some boundaries to keep our sweet little ones from crawling into places that may be unsafe.

Baby gates are handy, but let's be real, they're not meant to be permanently installed. Children grow into teenagers who grow into adults, and whether we want it or not, the world becomes one big, open, and, often-times, scary place.

Here's the problem with growing older. If we're not careful, we run the risk of putting baby gates back up in our paths, closing ourselves off from the hopes, dreams, and plans the Lord may still have for us! Perhaps it's just safer to wall up those God-given wants rather than lean in and continue to intercede for our heart's desires.

## Perhaps it's time to recapture the wonder found in the Christmas story. What I am learning is this: It's not just a wonderful story, it's a wonder-FILLED story.

Growing up as a little boy, I can still remember the first piece of Christmas decor that would take its place on top of our family piano in the house. Before the Christmas tree, before the lights in the yard, it all started here: the family nativity set. I can close my eyes and still see it. Every piece of that nativity set had a place. The manger sat at the center with Jesus perfectly placed in the middle with Mary and Joseph on either side. There were the shepherds, the wise men, and a couple of camels with some barnyard animals grazing. And above it all, a star that would light up the room at night.

My earliest memories of the nativity story were found in that little display my mother would put out each and every Christmas. It was calm, beautiful, peaceful, and incredibly serene. Yet, as I have grown with this story, I have found that the biblical narrative of that first Christmas morning was anything but calm, peaceful, and serene.

In this Advent daily devotional, we'll dig into the Christmas story found in Matthew and Luke's gospels and look at those in the nativity story. Where did this story meet them and where does it meet us today?

Let's recapture some wonder this holiday season.

**Mark Sorensen** began his ministry journey as a youth pastor in Texas. In his time serving as a worship leader in Louisiana, he answered a calling that had been on his heart to become an ordained minister, attending Asbury Theological Seminary. Sorensen became the lead pastor for the Harvest contemporary worship service at The Woodlands Methodist Church (TWMC). In 2021, he stepped into a new season of leadership as the senior pastor of TWMC. Mark is the co-author of *When Will Jesus Be Enough?* He and his wife, Nycki, have two children.

