

INTRO

- What's the best & worst thing about Christmas?
- Do you have any Christmas traditions?

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas. It's an ancient liturgy (worshipful form) designed to help us reflect on Jesus' 1st coming and anticipate his 2nd coming (advent = coming). This Advent we are focusing on the hope, peace, joy, and love found in the extraordinary story of Jesus.

Qu: Is Advent something new or familiar to you?

READ

Luke 1:26-38

REFLECT

When we talk about hope we often mean it in the sense of an expectation/wish for something but without the certainty of fulfillment eg. I hope my team wins, I hope to get that job.

Biblical hope offers certainty and therefore, when the bible talks about hope, it means something different from optimism or wishful thinking.

Qu: how would you distinguish between optimism and biblical hope?

1. Hope is about waiting with tense expectation

"How will this be?" v34

Pregnancy is a great metaphor of hope — the tension of waiting, expectation, struggle and change until finally hope is realized when the time is right.

Qu: Have you ever experienced hope as "waiting with tense expectation"? Describe.

2. Hope is waiting with tense expectation for God

"I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." v38

In other words, hope is waiting for God to act in accordance with his word.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I hope; — Ps 130:5

3. Hope in the present looks back and forward

Advent calls us to look back and participate in the 1st coming of Jesus, whilst we look forward and anticipate the 2nd coming of Jesus.

Qu: How does looking back to Jesus' 1st coming and forward to his 2nd coming strengthen our hope today?

4. Hope is ultimately based on Jesus

Whereas optimism is based on an *attitude* of confidence towards something, biblical hope is ultimately a confidence based on Jesus.

The angel announces to Mary that God is with her (v28). In Mt 1:23, Jesus is called *Immanuel*, meaning *God with us*.

Qu: What is the significance of Jesus being called, Immanuel?

A pregnant Mary is an unlikely but hopeful picture of biblical hope! God shows himself faithful to a social nobody (teenage girl from an insignificant town). Despite these circumstances, God's promise of the hope of the world is birthed through Mary as she trusts God to fulfill it (v38).

Hope means choosing to wait for God to bring about a future that's as surprising and full of promise as a virgin teenage girl falling pregnant and a crucified man rising from the dead.

Christmas is more than a birth; it's about a coming!

RESPOND & PRAY

- What challenged/encouraged you the most from today's discussion?