

**“Waiting & Welcoming”**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**  
**Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18–25**

Good morning, Church!

What a joy it is to stand here with you—children, youth, and adults—gathered together on this All-in Sunday as we continue our journey through Advent. Thank you, Violet, for reading our scripture this morning. The story of Joseph’s dream, the angel’s message, and the promise that this child will be called Emmanuel, “God with us,” reminds us that the message of Christmas belongs to all generations. Sometimes the clearest voice of hope comes from the youngest among us.

As someone who has worked in children’s ministry for over 20 years, I’ve seen the wonder of this season through the eyes of our kids. Today, I invite all of us, whatever age we are, to lean into that same sense of hope and wonder together.

Our theme this week is “*Waiting & Welcoming*.” Advent teaches us to wait for what God is bringing, and at the same time to welcome the signs of God’s promise already taking shape. This is the ‘already and not yet’ of our faith. We look back and see that Christ *has already* come, the promise is secure, yet we still look forward, knowing that God’s work in the world is *not yet* complete. We wait with a full heart, because we know the promise will be kept. Magrey deVega addresses this tension directly in chapter 2 of “*Awaiting the Already*,” stating: “*Advent is the season of living in the tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet.’ The already is Christ’s coming; the not yet is his fulfillment.*”

The passage we heard reminds us that God’s promise is already unfolding, even as we still wait for its fullness. We live in a world that often feels unfinished—where we still see injustice, where hearts are still broken. Our waiting is a necessary reminder that the world is still in the making, and God is not done yet. In fact, Matthew’s Gospel shows that this promise has been growing throughout the whole story of God’s people.

Before we learn about Joseph and Mary, Matthew's Gospel begins with something that might not seem exciting: a long list of names—a family tree. Why start this way? Because God's promise is rooted in history. God's faithfulness runs through generation after generation:

- Abraham, who was told, *"Through you all nations will be blessed."*
- David, who was promised his throne would last forever.
- The prophets, who declared, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."*

This list of names includes kings and heroes, but also people who were outsiders, like Rahab and Ruth, women of courage and faith who were not part of the original family. It also includes people who made huge mistakes—leaders who failed, family members who sinned. God doesn't wait for us to be perfect. God uses the whole, messy, beautiful history. Kids, think about your family tree. Maybe you've seen old photos or heard stories about grandparents. You're connected to them.

In the same way, Jesus' family story shows that God's promises keep going—even when people mess up, even when time passes, even when things look uncertain. We are not simply waiting for the story to happen *to us*; we are the next chapter of God's unfolding story. This history means our future is rooted not in our own strength, but in God's enduring faithfulness. We are part of that same family of faith.

Just like a tree grows one leaf at a time, God's great story grows one person, one act of faith, one generation at a time. Abraham was a leaf. David was a leaf. Ruth, Mary, Joseph—each one a leaf in God's unfolding story.

And now, we are part of that same growing tree of faith.

On the leaf you received when you came in [ask ushers to bring leaves around to those who may not have one], I want you to write one way you want to welcome Christ this week.

- Kids: maybe "I'll share my toy" or "I'll say thank you."

- Youth: maybe “I’ll encourage a friend” or “I’ll take a break from my phone to pray.”
- Adults: maybe “I’ll forgive someone” or “I’ll invite a neighbor to dinner.”

During the playing of *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*, write the word or phrase that identifies how you want to welcome Christ this week. And as you feel led, bring your leaf forward and place it on one of the trees. They represent the family of faith—past, present, and future. As you place your leaf, you’re saying, “*God, grow Your story in me. I want to welcome Christ in my life this week.*”

Joseph’s story shows us what it looks like when God’s ancient promises meet real human fear and faith. His world turns upside down when he learns Mary is expecting a child. He wants to do what’s right, but he’s confused. Then an angel appears in a dream: “Do not be afraid... the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew then tells us why this is happening **in chapter 1:22-23**: “*All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’*” This name, Emmanuel, is the final, powerful promise that ties all of history together. It is not just a promise of a future king, but a promise that God has chosen to be present, right here, right now, with us.

Can you imagine Joseph lying awake, wrestling with fear and uncertainty? Yet God speaks not with condemnation, but with comfort: “Do not be afraid.” Joseph had a choice: to protect his reputation or to trust God’s promise... He chose to welcome the vulnerable promise. This is what Magrey deVega calls the *‘risky welcome.’*

To truly welcome Christ is not always comfortable; sometimes, it means setting aside our own plans and fears for the sake of God’s greater call.

That’s what faithful waiting looks like: trusting God even when we don’t understand. It’s like waiting for a baby to be born. You don’t know the exact day, but you trust something important is coming. Faithful waiting in our lives may look like having patience with a difficult person or starting a new project without seeing the final outcome or holding on to hope when a loved one is struggling.

Waiting on God is active listening, ready to be interrupted by grace, just as Joseph was.

Joseph's obedience shows us how faith responds in uncertainty. As we continue in Matthew, though, we meet the wise men. And they show us another kind of faith—a faith that pursues. In Matthew chapter 2, they see a star and set out on a long journey. They bring gifts and kneel before Jesus. But even as they worship, King Herod grows fearful and dangerous, and the Holy family must flee.

Kids, that's like when something good happens, like a birthday party, but at the same time, something sad happens, like missing a friend that's moved away. Both can be true at once.

Advent reminds us that God's light keeps shining, even when life feels unsettled. This is what spiritual maturity looks like, whether you are 8 or 80. It is the ability to hold both the grief and the grace in the same hand. We celebrate the birth of Christ, the '*already*,' but we still ache for the day when all pain is gone, the '*not yet*.' Our welcome this week is our decision to look for the light, even when the shadows feel long.

And waiting doesn't mean not doing anything. Faithful waiting moves us toward love. While we wait, we act. We become part of God's work. For kids, that can look like sitting beside someone new at lunch or inviting someone to play with your group. For youth, it might look like standing up for a friend or bringing joy where others see only pressure. And for adults, it may look like offering forgiveness to someone, serving a neighbor, or giving generously.

Every act of love, every moment of mercy, every word of encouragement, this is how we welcome Christ again.

Kids, you are part of this story! You remind us how to hope, how to laugh, how to welcome joy. Youth, you show us courage and creativity in a world that needs both. Adults, your faith, patience, and endurance show us what it means to wait on the Lord. In all these ways—big and small, young and old—we live Advent together: waiting with hope, welcoming Christ through love.

Advent is something we do together—across generations, across stories We hold hands in the waiting and open our hearts in the welcoming. Together we wait with hope, together we welcome Christ through love.

This week—this second week of Advent—let's each look for one small way to make room for Christ: a word of kindness, a prayer of hope, a simple act of love. Remember Joseph? He was asked to do something small—trust the message in a dream—but that simple act led to a 'risky welcome' that changed the world.

We are not just leaves on a tree; we are active branches. God calls us to risk love, to risk forgiveness, to risk generosity, because every time we do, we are not just welcoming Christ into our lives, we are helping to complete God's story in the world. So, let's not limit ourselves to small things. God often begins with something small, but the Spirit may be nudging you toward something more. Maybe there's a conversation you've been avoiding, a relationship that needs healing, a step of generosity that feels a little uncomfortable, or a calling you've sensed but haven't acted on yet.

Small acts matter deeply—but God may also invite us into something bold, courageous, and transformative. So, let's be open not only to the gentle whispers of God's grace, but also to the larger invitations God may be placing before us.

Let us pray:

*Dear Jesus, you have come among us. Born of Mary, sent by the Father, sustained by the Spirit. You have entered our history, touched our fragility, and embraced our joy and sorrow. In this season of waiting, help us to remember your faithfulness, to welcome your surprises, and to live in your peace now. Light our darkness, bless our going out and our coming in, until that day when you make all things new. Amen.*