

December 13th



Advent 2020

“We all are starkly alone in our own skin — no one will ever see the world the way you do, through your eyes, from your vantage point.”

—Ann Voskamp

—A SEASON OF SADNESS & CELEBRATION—

“LONELINESS & PRESENCE”

Introduction:

- Christmas is often portrayed in the wider culture as a time of social and family gatherings. For many, however, this time of year is one in which feelings of loneliness and isolation become particularly acute. Articles were being written in 2019 about the “loneliness epidemic” and the situation has certainly worsened in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. Although we all have a sense of what loneliness is, it’s actually somewhat hard to define:

“Social isolation is an objective indicator of how much contact somebody has with other people, whereas loneliness is ‘the subjective feeling of isolation’...Being alone doesn’t necessarily mean you’re lonely, nor does being around people mean you’re not...Loneliness is a feeling only the person experiencing it can truly identify.”

Key Point: Through the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, God has demonstrated His _____ for us through His personal _____ among us, giving us hope both in the present and for the future.

Loneliness in Scripture

- **God made us to be relational beings.**

Gen. 2:15-18—¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” ¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

⇒ After the Fall, our first parents experienced estrangement from God (Gen. 3:8) and one another (Gen. 3:12-13) which bore tragic consequences among their children (Gen. 4:8, 16).

- **Loneliness and isolation are now a tragic part of the experience living in a fallen world.**

Psa. 25:16— Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

Psa. 102:6-7—⁶ I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; ⁷ I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.

Lam. 1:1-2—¹ How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. ² She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.

- **Scripture demonstrates that God is with His people even in their experience of loneliness.**

Gen. 28:15—Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Deut. 31:8—“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

- **God promised that His presence would one day be among His people in a consummate way.**

Isa. 40:9—Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”

Ezek. 37:27—“My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Key Point: The Scriptures present God’s presence among His people as the ultimate _____ to their experience of isolation and their feelings of loneliness.

Loneliness & the Promise of God’s Presence in the Story of Advent

Joseph & Mary

(1) The circumstances surrounding Mary’s pregnancy could have led them as individuals to feel isolated and alone.

⇒ In Mary’s case, emphasis is placed on God’s use of His _____ to give assurance of His presence (Luke 1:39-45)

⇒ In Joseph’s case, emphasis is placed on God’s use of His _____ to give assurance of His presence.

Matt. 1:22-23—²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”

- (2) Their journey to Bethlehem and the circumstances surrounding the birth of their son could have led them as a couple to feel isolated and alone.

Key Point: Their confidence in God was demonstrated by their _____ to His Word in spite of whatever their feelings may have been.

The Announcement to the Shepherds — Luke 2:8-20

Some Observations:

- (1) Along with the message they heard, the shepherds saw the _____ of the Lord (indicative of God's presence throughout Scripture).
- (2) The angel of the Lord calmed their fears and told them that He had come to proclaim to them _____ (Isa. 40:9).
- (3) The good news was that _____ had been born in Bethlehem and that God's presence had therefore come personally to His people.

Isa. 9:6—For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- (4) The coming of the lonely shepherds to the lonely couple was a great _____ to them all.

Luke 2:18-20—¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Key Point: The response of God's people to the good news of Messiah's birth was both personal _____ and corporate _____.

Knowing God's Presence in the Advent Season

1. Advent is a time to _____ the loneliness that is often part of living in a fallen world.

2. Advent is a time to _____ God's presence among us!

John 1:14—And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

⇒ *In Christ, God has come personally into our world and we are never truly alone because He has sent to us His Spirit who now _____ us as His people.*

1 Cor. 6:19-20—¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

⇒ *We can live with hope that God's presence will be among us forever in the _____.*

Rev. 21:3-4—³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."