



THE
ADVENT
OF
GLORY



24 DEVOTIONS FOR CHRISTMAS

R.C. SPROUL

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COMPANY

The Advent of Glory
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Dr R.C. Sproul was a theologian, Presbyterian pastor, and much-loved Bible teacher, whose many books include *The Holiness of God* and *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. He died in 2017.

The devotions in this book have been edited with the help of his wife, Vesta Sproul, largely from the transcripts of two series of talks given by Dr Sproul in his lifetime (*The Messiah is Born* and *The Coming of the Messiah*). Each chapter takes one key word from the Christmas story and uses it to meditate on the advent of Christ.

At the end of every chapter you will find a prayer reflecting on what you have just read. You can find out more about the writers of these prayers at the back of the book.

1. CERTAINTY



Growing up in Pittsburgh, it was a tradition in our home to go to the Christmas Eve service every year. We would assemble outside the church at about a quarter after ten, even though the service started at eleven, because so many people would congregate for that special candlelit event. It was filled with pageantry and great choral music, and at about 13 minutes to twelve, the minister would begin his Christmas Eve homily. Just as the clock reached twelve, in the middle of the sermon, the organist would start to play, and the pastor would stop his sermon in mid-sentence as the chimes began to sound. One... two... three... four... We would all sit there in the pews and count them. And as soon as the twelfth tone had registered, the pastor would smile to the congregation, and he would say, “It’s Christmas, and may I be the first on this day to wish you a Merry Christmas.”

It used to send chills up and down my spine. It was the same every year, and as I grew up, I never wanted to miss it—particularly not on those Christmas Eves when it had snowed and the lawn was covered in the newly fallen snow. There was just something about it; I loved it. But I was not a believer. To me, this was all just exciting pageantry, leading up to the next morning when we got to open the presents.

In September 1957, I had my conversion to Christianity. Like any new Christian, I was absolutely absorbed with the discovery of Christ. It was utter sweetness to me.

I remember my first Christmas as a Christian: coming back home from college for the holidays, driving through the snow to the church, going into the sanctuary, singing the same hymns that I had sung for so many years, hearing the sermon, hearing the chimes strike midnight. And this time, when the minister interrupted his sermon, listened to the chimes, and then leaned over the pulpit and said, “It’s Christmas,” I was about ready to walk into heaven! It was all the joy that I could handle. Now, for the first time, I was experiencing this pageantry as reality, as truth, as something that had actually taken place.

I was experiencing what Luke would have wanted me to experience when he wrote down the story in the first place.

“It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

(Luke 1:3-4)

Luke begins his gospel account by stating his purpose. *I don't want you to just be entertained by this story*, he says; *I want you to know it with full assurance that these things that I am about to relate to you are the sober truth*. The accounts that he is going to give to us are not the accounts of speculation; he has compiled a series of eyewitness reports (v 1-2).

Luke wasn't an eyewitness himself. He was converted by the apostles and came under the tutelage of Paul. Much of what Luke knew, he had gained from his association with Paul, as well as with others who were among the first disciples. It's very likely that Luke had the privilege of interviewing Mary, the mother of Christ. He gives us more information about the birth of Jesus than anybody else, and he got all that information from an eyewitness.

Luke wrote an orderly, historical, carefully documented account to strengthen our faith and give us certainty. That was his burden. That was his passion. That was his task under God: to set forth for us, and for our certainty, how it really was.

So much of Christmas, for so many people, can be just empty excitement and pageantry. But Luke wants to let us know that here, we're not talking about fables or legends or religious fairy tales. Christmas is about something that really took place in space and time. Which—as I discovered that Christmas in 1957—makes it not less wondrous but even more so.

Why can certainty about Christ's life and work lead to joy? Does it for you?

A PRAYER FOR TODAY

by Chris Larson

Our Father and our God, there is none like you. You are a God who remembers your people as a tender father remembers his child. The eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us, leaving glory, entering into our fallen world, all to seek and save that which was lost. We thank you for your mercy in loving your people to the uttermost. Nothing is too difficult for you, for with you all things are possible. And so we know that you have come near to us in your Son, Jesus Christ, coming down so that we can be raised up through faith alone by the power of the Spirit. What mystery is now revealed. What a gift of love is now unwrapped for the world to see. May we live with certainty because of the first advent of our Lord, even as we await his promised return. Thank you, our faithful God.

Amen.

2. TIME



The birth of Jesus is the moment that divides history, and I don't just mean into BC and AD. Long before anyone invented that system of counting the years, this was the most important moment in the world—the most important time there has ever been. In Luke's Gospel, we see the first hint of this in the angel's words to Zechariah:

“Behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled *in their time*.”

(Luke 1:20, emphasis added)

In the Greek language there are two distinct words for “time.” One is *chronos*, and the other is *kairos*. There's enormous significance in the distinction between those two words.

We're familiar with the word *chronos*. We have newspapers called "Chronicle," which tell us about what's happening in our times. We sometimes use the technical word "chronometer" to refer to clocks and timepieces—things that measure time. The word *chronos*, then, means the normal passing of time. It's how we measure our lives. We have a chronology to what we do: everything that happens is taking place within the context of *chronos*.

The word *kairos* is a little tougher to get hold of. It refers to a specific, particular moment in time—a moment of extraordinary significance. It's not that it takes place outside time—it is part of the broad flow of time. But it is a point that defines the meaning of all time.

The distinction between the two is similar to the distinction we make between the words "historical" and "historic." Everything that ever happened is historical, isn't it? But we don't use the term "historic" to refer to every event that ever took place. No, we say that 1066 was historic because of the Battle of Hastings. Or 1776 was historic because of the United States' Declaration of Independence—and so on. The word "historic" is telling us that a certain event is crucial—it has a significance beyond the normal. It's the same with *kairos*.

This is the word that the angel used when he spoke to Zechariah. "My words ... will be fulfilled in their time."

“Time” there is *kairos*. It speaks of a particular time—a time that was finally coming to pass after centuries and centuries of prophetic promise and of patient waiting by the people of God.

The angel was speaking about the birth of John the Baptist, but John’s birth was intended to prepare the way for an even more important moment in time. “When the fullness of time had come,” Galatians 4:4 tells us, “God sent forth his Son.”

That’s a strange image, isn’t it—the fullness of time? The word “fullness” is the Greek word *pleroma*, and it means being filled to capacity or filled to the point of bursting. Imagine you’ve put an empty glass in the sink underneath the spigot. You turn on the water, watch it fill the glass, and leave the tap on. The water continues to stream, and once it reaches the edge of the glass, it begins to spill out. That’s *pleroma*: something that is full to the point of overflowing or full to the bursting point.

That’s what happened at the moment of Jesus’ birth. The time was full.

Our Creator made the world, and from that moment, the clock started to tick. History began, not as an aimless, purposeless flow of time but as something moving forward, moment by moment, second by second, day by day, year by year, toward an appointed destiny. Time passed, and it was being filled up by the plan of God and by the work of God. Then there came that critical

junction in human history when the time—the *kairos*—was filled to capacity at last and burst out with the birth of a baby who was the incarnation of God.

Jesus' birth—in fact, Jesus' whole life, and especially his death and resurrection—these are the crucial moments of *kairos*. These are the moments that define all other moments in history, before or since.

How can you let the moment of Jesus' birth define the moments of your day today?

A PRAYER FOR TODAY

by Rosemary Jensen

Dear Lord, our sovereign God, you chose the day that we now call the first Christmas Day before the foundation of the world. You knew how many hours each of your children would have to use for your glory. Forgive me for wasting so much time in the past year and for not using all my hours in ways that honored you. Please help me use these days before Christmas to honor you by preparing for your return, even as I prepare to celebrate your birth. I thank you for my birth too, and for my second birth, which took place by your grace through faith in you. For Christmas morning, I pray that my greatest joy will be to wake up knowing that you were born in time and space as the God-man—for me and for others who believe in you as Lord and Savior.

In your name, amen.