

(BLESS story: Aubri--tire)

Did anyone get hurt in any Black Friday frenzies?

Did anyone hurt someone else in the Black Fri frenzy,
and *feel good about it?* ;-)

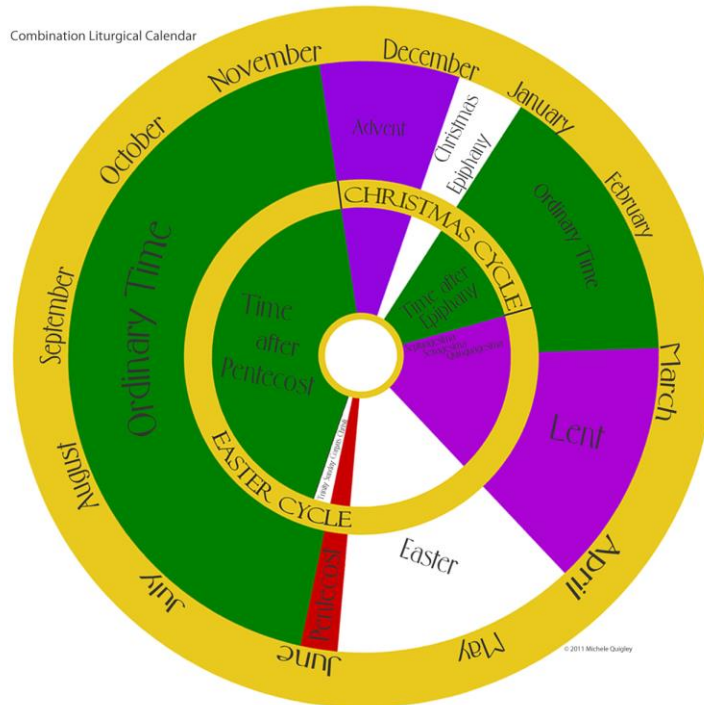
(Pray)

Something we haven't really taught on very much around here is Advent.
Many of you right now are thinking,
"Yeah, what's Advent?"

Well today is the first day of Advent because it starts four Sundays before Christmas
and goes up to Christmas Eve.

In very loose terms (get more specific), Advent is the Christmas season.

Advent is a season in the Church calendar:



The other two major and most known Church seasons are Lent and Easter.

Advent means "arrival"-- in this case, it's the arrival of Jesus. So Advent is a season of waiting on that arrival.

Waiting is something we don't much care for. We see waiting as a waste of time.

To us, waiting is the wasted space between all the significant things we're looking forward to.

But Advent is a spiritual season of waiting.

We might think it's a season of waiting til Christmas day when we finally get to see people open the gifts we've chosen, finally get to see those loved ones, but it's so much more than that.

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Let's go way back in time---to the time period around Jesus' birth:

God had gone dark. He'd gone silent.

It was about 400-500 years from the last prophecies about Jesus in the book of Malachi until Jesus' birth.

So there were these 4-5 CENTURIES where there had been no sign, no communication from God to us.

For us now, the difference between Malachi's last word from God and Jesus in a manger is literally *turning 2 pages in our Bible*.

God speaks to Malachi about Jesus, 2 pages later, He's crying in a manger.

But in reality, the difference was 4-5 centuries.

For us that would mean we last heard from God in the 1500-1600s!

So imagine being there in that time period.

Imagine your family, as far back as everyone knew, had followed God--all of your ancestors.

The stories had trickled down through your family of how God led your enslaved relatives out of Egypt.

Your relatives were there when God wrote out the first 5 books of the Bible.

Your relatives were there when God gave your people their own king.

And your descendants were there when God was speaking words through the prophets, Isaiah thru Malachi.

And now for 400-500 years, God seemed to be gonzo.

Think about that--how many generations of your family are represented over a 400-500 year time span: 8,10, 12 generations?

After 400-500 years of God's silence,
would you wonder if the stories you heard about God were true?
Would you maybe get to a point where you wondered if He ever existed?

Would you wonder, who or what you're really putting your faith into?

But finally-- there's an arrival!

After all that waiting.
After all that hoping.
After all that anticipating.

Finally, as Ricky Bobby would say, a cute little baby Jesus.

⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.⁹

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

¹² And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Luke 2:8-14 KJV

God shows up. Always.

Not in *our* time, but in His.

Not according to *our* agenda,
but to His perfect plans.

And all throughout God's Word, there's this reoccurring theme:

There's something good and God-pleasing about our waiting.

"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord."

Lamentations 3:25-26 NASB

And you and I read the few pages between Malachi and the birth of Baby Jesus and we say,

"Yes, God's timing is perfect!

His plans are perfect.

He can be trusted."

But when waiting on God gets closer to home it gets harder, doesn't it?

It's easy to trust God in the pages of a Book
that shows how the stories end.

It's harder to trust God in the pages of our *life*, isn't it?

In this season of Advent, where we revisit the
waiting for the Christ Child,

What is it you're waiting for in your life?

Employment?

A soul mate--someone to share your life with?

A relationship to be reconciled?

Finally being ok with your past?

Your body to be healed?

Someone you love to pull through?
That moment when you can really trust God?
God to tell you why you're here--your purpose?
A child to come back to you? To be healed or whole again?
Someone you love dearly to accept Christ? Return to Christ?
To finally get control of your finances?
Freedom from a sinful habit or addiction?

What are *you* waiting on this Advent season?_____.

Our spiritual ancestors waited 4-5 centuries for Jesus' birth as God was silent.

But because God finally appeared in his perfect time,
according to His perfect plan.

And because Jesus grew into a man who allowed himself to be
nailed to a tree to pay for our sin.

And because Jesus arose from the tomb and ascended into heaven.

And because the Holy Spirit then came to indwell *all* who are
adopted into God's family.

Whatever we're waiting for this Advent season,
the Spirit of God in us,
waits with us.

Our ancestors, waited in silence for centuries
for an answer to their prayers.

We now get to wait with the Holy Spirit with the promise that NOTHING can separate
us from God and His love. (Romans 8:38)

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So there is a part of Advent that as we wait on Christmas day to arrive, we also are
reminded of that long waiting that our spiritual ancestors went through.

And reminded that God is now with us, even as we're waiting for Him to move in his
perfect timing, in the concerns of our life.

And there is another significance to Advent:

Advent also reminds us that in *this* time, here and now,
we are in a different period of waiting on Jesus.

Jesus himself spoke of a time when He would return:

³⁵ Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

³⁶ "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself.^[k] Only the Father knows.

³⁷ "When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. ³⁸ In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. ³⁹ People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

Matthew 24:35-39 NLT

And so Advent reminds us that we're *still* waiting on Jesus, but in a different form.

And just as the advent of Jesus' birth gave *hope* to our spiritual ancestors, so the advent of *Jesus' return* gives us hope.

How?

By knowing that Jesus' return will usher in a time when things like the tragedies in Ferguson Missouri will cease to exist.

Jesus's return will usher in a time when all the things that break our hearts will cease to exist.

Jesus will set things right once and for all time.

And so we're reminded in this Advent season that the
horrors, tragedies and heartbreaks of this age...
will someday--*no one knows when*--

but will someday be conquered by King Jesus. (eg **Revelation 19:12-16**)

And so as you and I *do everything we can*
to be Jesus' hands and feet,
redeeming this broken world,
physically and spiritually helping and blessing people
and situations as God leads us--

we hope and look forward *with anticipation* to
Jesus' return and a world that will ultimately be righted for all time.

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So Advent is this season we wait to
celebrate the birthday of Baby Jesus.

During Advent we wait on God with God
praying to God for the things only He can provide.

During Advent we wait, *hoping* for that day when
King Jesus returns and sets all things *right*.

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There is this one little Advent detail I noticed this week:

So the LORD must wait for you to come to him
so he can show you his love and compassion.

For the LORD is a faithful God.

Blessed are those who wait for his help.

Isaiah 30:18 NLT

“The Lord must wait on YOU to come to him.

I so often think in selfish terms. Things like,

“Why aren’t *you* fixing this, God?”

“Why are *you* waiting to do something about that, God?”

But as I read Isaiah 30, I wondered,

“How many times has God waited on me?”

How many times has God waited on US?

How many times has God waited for us to pray?

How many times has He waited for us to do something
that He was nudging us to do?

How many times have we wondered where God was,
instead of questioning

if we were being attentive to God?

One thing is true in the whole of the Bible, then and now:

God has been relationally pursuing us, longing to close the gap when there has been
separation between Him and us.

And today, at the beginning of this Advent season, it's no different.

No matter who you are,
no matter what you've done or NOT done--
the truth of **Malachi 3:18** rings true today, right now...

"So the LORD must wait for you to come to him
so he can show you his love and compassion.
For the LORD is a faithful God.
Blessed are those who wait for his help."

So on the first day of this Advent season that's about waiting,
what is God waiting for us to come to Him about?
What is it He's waiting on us to take action about?

(setup response card)

Song: *Waiting Here for You*