

The Incarnation

The Embodied Arrival
of Hope



Advent Meditations

NATASHA STEENKAMP

Redeemer
COUNSELING

EMBODIED HOPE

When I consider the fullness of the Good News of Jesus Christ, my counselor heart just loves to dwell on the wonder of the Incarnation. Emmanuel, God-with-us, entering our embodied world by taking on our human form. In Jesus, the Holy God himself chose to physically step into our story, not just to reconcile us back to Himself, but also to give us a felt sense of his face and his heart towards us. As John 1:18 states, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

Why does this encourage me so much as a therapist? At Redeemer Counseling, we value human beings as embodied souls. We know that God deemed it good to design us with bodies to house our souls and that these bodies are present for all that we experience in this life. When we are not resourced enough to fully process the trauma and losses that we encounter throughout our life, our bodies have a way of holding onto the experiences as well as the internalized beliefs connected to these overwhelming events. It then implies that the healing process of grieving, receiving comfort and experiencing restoration to safe attachment/connection are experiences that also need to be embodied - not just intellectually understood, but felt.

This has been the testimony of many of our clients at Redeemer Counseling, who describe some of the most powerful moments of change as those where they felt Emmanuel entering into their places of wounding, fear and shame and experienced a felt sense of “Him-with-me”. Moments where not only their minds, but their senses and nervous systems, experienced His embodied closeness, safety, his attunement and compassionate responsiveness. In therapeutic language we could label this as the “undoing of aloneness,*” which is such an essential part of our healing process. We believe that it is these felt corrective relational experiences with Christ that heal our deepest wounds, rewrite the old shame-filled narratives about ourselves and free us from our enslaving self-redemption strategies.

The following Advent meditations reflect on the good news of the Incarnation and how it continues to offer hope and healing to our embodied souls. You can read and listen along to each one. I invite you to connect with and drop down into your body, using your breath, inviting all of your senses and even your imagination to participate as you engage with these empowering truths displayed to us in the flesh by our incarnated Christ.



A God who desires to be with us

ADVENT MEDITATION 1

Scriptures: Mark 10:13-16



LISTEN ALONG

Jesus shows us how God desires to be with us. Being with us matters to Him. To the point of taking on a bodily form - approaching us as He invites us to approach him. He is not distant. In fact, He removes every obstacle that creates separation from him. We see Jesus repeatedly demonstrating it in the flesh throughout the Gospels, as here in Mark 10:13-16.

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

As you slowly read through this passage 2-3 times, imagine inserting yourself in this story as one of these little children. Perhaps, you might even connect to a young part of yourself.

- **What do you feel in your body as you hear Jesus' indignation towards the disciples? As He says, "do not hinder them"? As He affirms his desire for you to come close?**
- **What does it feel like to imagine yourself being enveloped by Jesus' arms, drawing you close to himself and blessing your childlike approach? Try to just stay present with the felt sensation for a moment, taking in His nearness and his delight in you.**
- **What would you want to say to Jesus or do in this felt closeness? What do you imagine He would say back to you? Linger in this felt interaction for a while.**



A God who weeps with us

ADVENT MEDITATION 2

Scriptures: John 11:33-36, 38



LISTEN ALONG

As I have grieved significant losses in my own life and also supported others in their grief, one of the most comforting connections to Christ's embodied compassion has been this passage in John 11. Jesus enters into the raw grief of two sisters and their community as they mourn the death of a beloved brother. Here we witness how Jesus brings God's tears to us in the flesh.

When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"... Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb.

— John 11:33-36, 38

- **Imagine yourself being part of this community in their moment of collective grief and then Jesus shows up. What is it like to see Jesus witnessing the sorrow of these two sisters? To see His body language and facial expression as he becomes "deeply moved"? Imagine how His facial muscles move as he starts to cry, see the tears roll down his cheek, hear the sound of his weeping.**
- **What response does this expression of His compassion stir inside of you? Allow yourself to linger here and notice the felt sensation of observing a deeply moved Christ.**
- **You might even want to invite Him to bring his tears to some of your own losses and sorrow, to put his arm around you and weep with you as he bears witness to your pain. O come, O come, Emmanuel! Rest here in His felt closeness and comfort.**



A God who suffers with us

ADVENT MEDITATION 3

Scriptures: Isaiah 53:3
Mark 14:33-35

LISTEN ALONG

As we navigate the trauma, wounds and losses that are part of living in a broken world, we tend to gravitate to companions who “get it.” Jesus is such a companion. Because He dwelt with us humans in our broken world and in our vulnerabilities, we have access to an embodied, suffering Savior who experientially knows the limitations of the human body, knows what physical pain feels like, knows the felt experience of rejection, being misunderstood, disregarded, betrayed, abused. Consider the following two passages that paint such a vivid picture of Jesus’ embodied experiences:

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
— Isaiah 53:3

He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by.
— Mark 14:33-35

- **Slowly read through the two passages, breathing through these words that describe Jesus’ incredible physical and emotional suffering, his desire for support from his closest friends, his anxious cry to his Father for another way.**
- **Now, reflect silently for a few moments, writing down a word or phrase from the passages that gives you a sense that Jesus can identify with your own experiences of suffering. Notice the felt sensation or emotion that this word/phrase stirs inside you. Pause in this place.**
- **Consider writing a response to Jesus, possibly starting with: “Jesus, knowing that you have also felt..... makes me feel.....” Stay in this experience with Jesus for a moment.**



A God who sacrifices himself to save and heal us

ADVENT MEDITATION 4

Scriptures:
Isaiah 53:5-6, 11



LISTEN ALONG

It is Jesus' embodied sacrifice on the cross that rescues us from our sin and heals our shame. He became like us so that we can become like Him. Beloved.

But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all... And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. Is. 53:5-6, 11

- **Slowly read through the passage out loud, allowing yourself to pause as you notice different sensations or emotions stirring inside as you reflect on the physical embodiment of God's love for you through Jesus' suffering and sacrifice.**
- **As you stay connected to this felt experience, pray the words of the passage back to Jesus in the first person voice, starting with, "Jesus, you were pierced for my rebellion, crushed for my sins..."**
- **Imagine how Jesus responds to you. Feel His love and his heart for you.**

Rejoice! Rejoice!

ADVENT MEDITATION 5

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:2-4



LISTEN ALONG

*“Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn”*

These lines from “O Holy Night” are my favorite of all Christmas hymns, as it names the light and hope that breaks into our dark, broken existence when the embodied Son of God arrives. I am always struck by the words “the weary world”. For me, it speaks to the exhaustion that results from our ongoing failed efforts to heal our own wounds and shame through self-reliant strategies of power, control, approval or comfort. And then, in the midst of the darkness and weariness, a thrill of hope...hope not as a dreamy, abstract idea, but as an embodied Person. Jesus. Everything changes.

- **Take a moment to quiet and ground yourself by feeling your feet connect to the floor and taking a deep breath. Acknowledge what your body is holding as you come into this meditation. Maybe it is holding anxiety, heaviness, sadness or even hopelessness? Make space for that by noticing and naming the thought, emotion and/or felt sensation. Do not try to push it away, to figure it out or solve it.**
- **Then, slowly read the four lines above of “Oh Holy Night” out loud. Pause. Notice which word or phrase draws you in most. Feel free to repeat.**
- **Take a moment to notice how your body responds to the words. Perhaps there is a longing that stirs, a cry, a sigh or a longer exhale, a fluttering of relief or even a felt sense of release.**
- **Invite Jesus to be with you in whatever your felt experience might be. Imagine his posture, his tone, his facial expression as he sits with you in this experience. Rejoice, rejoice!**

In conclusion, reflect on what it has been like to engage with an embodied Christ in an embodied way through these meditations.



Natasha Steenkamp is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Clinical Supervisor at Redeemer Counseling. She graduated with a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling from Biblical Theological Seminary. Natasha works with individual clients on a broad range of issues including trauma, depression, anxiety, sexual abuse, shame and interpersonal struggles. Drawing from her personal journey of grief, following the tragic and sudden loss of her younger brother in 2011, Natasha specializes in helping clients who have suffered various losses.

