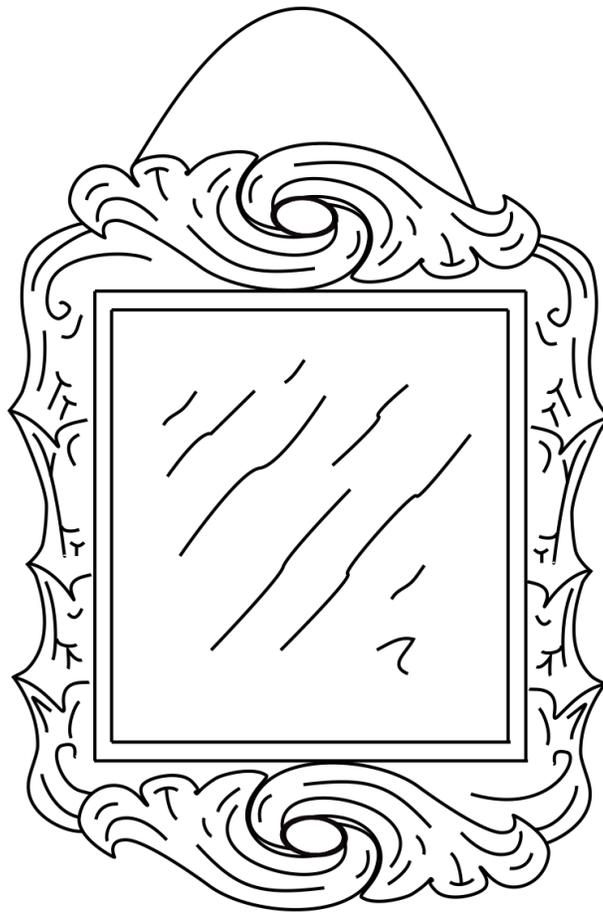


Patty Kirk

THE GOSPEL OF CHRISTMAS

REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT



Reader's Guide

Kailey Bain, Kendra Chester, and Ginger Macfarlan

InterVarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
Email: email@ivpress.com

©2012 by *Kailey Bain, Kendra Chester, and Ginger Macfarlan*

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press.

InterVarsity Press® is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA®, a movement of students and faculty active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing in the United States of America, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and regional activities, write Public Relations Dept., InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 6400 Schroeder Rd., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895, or visit the IVCF website at <www.intervarsity.org>.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Design: Ginger Macfarlan

Images: Alix Davis

Introduction to the Guide

Dear Reader,

Christmas is such a busy time: baking gingerbread cookies for the office Christmas party, standing in line after line to buy gifts for everyone you know, cleaning the house furiously to impress the mother-in-law arriving next week, and dragging the kids outside to go sledding so they can build childhood memories. Even sitting down to read a book about Christmas seems like a lot of work. But each year at Christmas, we long to pause and ponder about why God sent his precious Son to earth in the form of a helpless baby.

As you read Patty Kirk's *The Gospel of Christmas: Reflections for Advent*, you will probably want to take time to think about what Christmas is really about. Here are some questions to guide you through the process. Each chapter's guide begins with Scripture for meditation followed by a question for personal reflection and a question for application. We hope this guide and *The Gospel of Christmas* will help you to find meaning and comfort during this year's Advent.

--Kailey, Kendra, and Ginger

I. Come

- Read Chapter 1, “Come,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“Come near to God, and he will come near to you.” James 4:8a

1. In this chapter, Kirk recalls one of her favorite Christmas memories: ice skating and hot chocolate (page 12). Reflect on one of your favorite memories. Where do you see connections between your story and the story of Christ’s birth?

2. Kirk breaks the word *Advent* apart to show its meaning: to come (page 9). How is God specifically calling you to come to him this season?

II. The First Snow of Winter

- Read Chapter 2, “The First Snow of Winter,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go

and meet with God?” Psalm 42:2

1. Like Mary’s worries about her unexpected pregnancy, what fears and anxieties are weighing on your heart right now?

2. Take a look at the lyrics of a carol that might not be your favorite. What can it teach you about the meaning of Christmas?

III. Advent

- Read Chapter 3, “Advent,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“In him and through faith in him we may approach God

with freedom and confidence.” Ephesians 3:12

1. What is it about the approaching Christmas season that excites you? How does it play into your relationship with God?

2. Which annoys you more during the holiday season—festivities beginning too early or beginning too late? Why? How can you extend grace to those who fall into the other camp?

IV. The Faith of a Child

- Read Chapter 4, “Come,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain

of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1

1. How have your religious experiences as a child shaped your faith today?
2. What visible, tangible object can you use to draw near to God during this Christmas season?

V. “Stille Nacht”

- Read Chapter 5, “Stille Nacht”, from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

*“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope
comes from him.” Psalm 62:5*

1. Pray the prayer at the end of the chapter (page 59). What resonates with you? In what parts of your life do you need to let God still you?
2. When do you need to be alone? When do you need to be around other people? How can you establish a healthy rhythm of solitude and fellowship during this Advent season?

VI. Joseph's Dreams

- Read Chapter 6, “Joseph’s Dreams”, from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28*

1. Have you ever had a dream that seemed divinely sent? What do you think God might be telling you through your dreams?

2. Kirk imagines the Christmas story through Joseph’s eyes (pages 60-63). Imagine the story through another character’s perspective—the innkeeper’s, Mary’s parents’, or even the donkey’s. What new insights do you glean from the story?

VII. And He Is In The Manger Now

- Read Chapter 7, “And He Is In The Manger Now”, from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever
believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16*

1. In coming to earth, Christ humbled himself by giving up many divine attributes: comfort, power, foreknowledge, strength. What is the proper response to this sacrificial act by Christ? What human attributes would you find it difficult to give up if your divine calling required it?

2. Who are the unlikable, the untouchable, the unlovable in my life that God is calling you to love?

VIII. Anointed

- Read Chapter 8, “Anointed”, from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” Psalm 25:9

1. The four Gospels all begin differently: Matthew with Christ’s genealogy, Mark with the ministry of John the Baptist, Luke with the birth of Jesus, and John with philosophy on the person of Christ. Which opening most appeals to you? Why?

2. What are some specific ways you can learn to see mundane things as potentially “anointed” by God?

IX. Troughs

- Read Chapter 9, “Troughs,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:6-7

1. Kirk explores unexpected perspectives in this chapter: the etymology of the Middle English word *cratch* (pages 87-88), detailed descriptions of livestock farming (pages 96-99), and a German fairy tale (pages 92-93). What stories from outside the Bible have given more meaning to your Christmas season?
2. With Baby Jesus lying in a trough, his tiny body probably close to animals chomping at their feed, he might have been in danger. What made Mary and Joseph qualified to be Jesus’ parents? What would have disqualified them? What makes you feel confident to bear Christ today?

X. Washing Socks

- Read Chapter 10, “Washing Socks,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.’”

Luke 2:10-11

1. In Kirk’s retelling of the angels and shepherds (pages 113-115), the angels came to the shepherds in the middle of the mundane. Where in your mundane activities has God approached you?

2. The Jews longed for a Savior, looking for the Messiah in every sphere: political, economic, and personal. What areas in your life make you long for a Savior?

XI. In The Bleak Midwinter

- Read Chapter 11, “In The Bleak Midwinter,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to

your promise to your servant.” Psalm 119:76

1. As a child, how did you think about sin? How has your perspective changed as you’ve grown up?

2. Is the Christmas season a dark time for you? How can you take comfort from the Christmas season?

XII. Seeking God

- Read Chapter 12, “Seeking God,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

1. Followers of Christ sought him in different ways: Peter recognized him as the Son of God, Mary called him the Messiah, and Nicodemus addressed him as “Rabbi.” Which follower of Christ do you most relate to? Why?

2. Kirk mentions that believers must keep on asking God where he is (page 154). Are you constantly seeking after God in your life? When do you find yourself forgetting to seek God?

XIII. Living Life Abundantly: A Parable

- Read Chapter 13, “Living Life Abundantly: A Parable,” from *The Gospel of Christmas*.

“He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Revelation 21:5a

1. In what areas of your life do you find yourself waiting on God instead of treasuring where you are now?
2. When are you like Charlotte and Lulu, unwilling to let things go to make room for new things? What should you give up to make room for God’s blessings this year?