

DIVINE INTERVENTION

A LIFE TEEN ADVENT COMPANION

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“In the stable at Bethlehem, Heaven and Earth meet.”
– Pope Benedict XVI

INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR OF CREATION

Have you ever stopped to consider everything that had to fall into place and happen for you to be here — in this moment — right now?

Long before your parents or grandparents even met, God was at work with the intention of creating *you*. You are not a mistake or a coincidence or a surprise ... you are here by design — God's design — because **God loves you and desires you to be here.**

But, to be clear, it took a lot of work to bring you to where you are today, both as a body and as a soul. Anyone can look at the beauty of creation, like a starry sky or an ocean sunrise or a lightning storm, and get the sense that there is a creator — a divine designer — behind all of them. Saint Paul even pointed this out to the Romans 2,000 years ago. **(Romans 1:20)** Throughout the created universe, from the solar system to the seahorse, from the planets to the porcupine, from the volcano to the vampire bat, one can see the complexity of God's design all around them. The fingerprints of the Creator can be seen in every fingerprint of all 8.3 billion people walking the planet.

It takes an open mind and a humble heart, though, first to see God's presence in all of it, and next to begin to understand why you, personally, are within it. You are more than a "creation" to the Creator. You were made in God's very image and likeness, and by virtue of your immortal soul and your baptism, you have immense, immeasurable, and almost incomprehensible worth. **(Genesis 1:26)** For you are not merely God's creation; you are his son or daughter. You bear and share in the family name. God's very Spirit dwells within you and — if you're Catholic — his very flesh and blood run through your veins.

But, again, you aren't here because you willed yourself to be here or merely because your mother and father created you. No, God played a significant role in your creation and story up until now. It just takes the humility to step back and see it.

THE AUTHOR OF YOUR STORY

God is the Author of your story. **(Acts 3:15)** He is the architect of your life. He is the master who, an eternity ago, began moving all of the chess pieces around the board to ensure that you would be here, in this moment, reading this little book. He knew it before your great grandparents even met.

Maybe you know your entire family history. Or maybe you struggle to remember that one aunt's first name. Or maybe you fall somewhere in the middle. Regardless, God's had his hand in every detail of your creation. He knit you together in your mother's womb **(Psalm 139:13)**, he has every hair on your head counted **(Matthew 10:30)**, and your name is carved in his hand **(Isaiah 49:16)**. You are unique and irreplaceable and — just like the beauty of a star-lit sky — **you reflect God's glory in a way no words can express.**

Now, if God went to all that trouble — moving your ancestors from one location to another, creating situations for your great great grandparents to meet and your great grandparents to connect and your grandparents to fall in love — does he sound like a God who leaves things to chance or more like a Father with a master plan?

There are no "coincidences" when it comes to God. Everything is intentional. Even when we try to take control and push God out of the driver's seat and mess up the plan (because of our pride and our sin), God finds a way to write straight with our crooked lines and get us back on track. God's GPS is constantly rerouting us to the same destination.

This is our reality but, again, it takes slowing down and prayerfully pausing once in a while to remember that God is not only in control, but that he is actively working for your salvation every second of every day. *God desires your salvation even more than you do.* That's one of the gifts that Advent brings: a broader perspective of how God is — and has always been — trying to save us all.

THE AUTHOR OF HIS-STORY

The season of Advent is not just a time of preparation for Christmas (although it is that, too) but a time of celebration. A time to reflect, to repent, and to realize that **we have a God who not only has a plan but took flesh and became the plan in the person of Jesus Christ.**

In the Garden of Eden, right after the Fall of humankind, when the fruit juice was still running down Adam's and Eve's faces, God promised to send us a Savior — born of a woman — to redeem us. **(Genesis 3:15)** Over the next centuries, the Old Testament writings reveal event after event and prophecy after prophecy in which God moved the pieces into position to fulfill that promise at an appointed time.

Throughout Advent we hear the readings and see the divinely intervening “arrows” that all pointed to the event we are preparing to celebrate in a few weeks, namely the Incarnation, when God took flesh and heaven came to earth. Two thousand years ago, the Creator entered creation in an unexpected way with one singular purpose: to save us.

Heaven came to earth to bring earth back to heaven.

Ever since that blessed and shocking event beneath a Bethlehem sky, Christians have paused to contemplate and celebrate God's divine intervention and all that went into it then and now. We have hymns and songs that remind us of all that transpired, decor and artwork that point us to the beautiful reality that is Christmas. There might not be a more iconic representation of both Advent and Christmas, however, than the scene of the Nativity. You likely have a nativity set in your home and most definitely at your local parish, but do you know *why* it's there and historically *how* it came to be?

Before the year 1223, most people celebrated Christmas by going to Mass in Latin, a language few people spoke. Some churches would feature beautiful artwork of the Child Jesus, but St. Francis of Assisi wanted to think bigger. He wanted to make the story of the Holy Family

more accessible to ordinary people. So after a Christmas Eve Mass in December 1223, he found a small cave outside of Greccio, Italy, where he enlisted people to play the roles of Mary and Joseph while cradling a wax figure of the baby Jesus. He invited local shepherds and their sheep. He also borrowed a live donkey and a live ox from a local farmer for the scene.

Yes, over eight centuries ago, the world's first nativity set was a "living nativity." Then and now — whether a live outdoor scene, ornate statues at your parish, or a simple setup in your home — the Nativity is not so much a mystery to be viewed but a mystery to behold. For the same God that had to intervene repeatedly throughout history for the events of that December night to unfold is the same God who has and does intervene in your life, daily, to make you holy and to bring you home to heaven.

So over the next 30 days, we are going to reflect not only on how God moved (past tense) in the Advent and Christmas stories, but also on how God is still moving (present tense) in our story. Each day, we will contemplate a different aspect of the Nativity scene — a character, creature, object, or key element in the story.

Feel free to begin and end these 30 days at any point during the Advent and Christmas seasons. You could

begin on the First Sunday of Advent, or on December 1st, or exactly 29 days before Christmas Day. The next few weeks are not just about preparing for Christmas but about seeing how God prepared the world for his coming then, now, and forevermore.

I'll be praying, daily, for each of you reading this little booklet over the next few weeks. Never forget how valuable you are to God, to his Church, and to the world. You are loved more than you can fathom.

Now, let's enter into the ADVENTure.

You are His. Stay His,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

DAY ONE

JESUS

He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

– Luke 2:21

GOD MOVED

God saves. That's what his name actually means. "Jesus" literally means "God saves." God's mission is a part of his very identity.

God sent a heavenly messenger to a teenage virgin with news that would radiate heaven and rock the earth. The time had finally come for his promise to be fulfilled. All pieces were moved into place, and all prophecies — spanning centuries and dozens of different prophets — had now come to fruition.

The verse above actually occurs at the "end" of the Nativity story, after the baby Jesus is born ... but notice the detail St. Luke includes: the name was given *before* Jesus was conceived. So before the Savior entered the world, his mission and purpose were already made known. This was a vocation only God could fulfill.

So, in essence, the end of the Nativity story is pointing back to the beginning. Why is this so important? Well, it shows that God fulfilled what he had announced through the angel's message to Mary. He announced it and he backed it up and he followed through on his word. We have a God who keeps his promises ... which is a great daily reminder for life. **He might not always fulfill a promise according to our expectations or our timing, but God's plans are perfect**, he sees the "full picture," and he makes good on every promise.

God always has the end in mind, and it's always the same: our salvation.

GOD IS MOVING

Do you trust God, like really trust him? Do you trust that he desires you in heaven even more than you do? Do you believe that his timing and his plan are better than yours? Do you let him be the true Author of your story, or are you constantly trying to grab the pen and write your own storyline?

His plan is always better.

Just as we saw with Jesus, there is a vocation that only you can fulfill. There is a mission for which you were uniquely created and for which you are uniquely suited. God set you apart for your mission with intentionality and purpose. **(Jeremiah 1:5)** And your mission won't just help save you; it will help save others.

The reason Jesus came was to save. The reason we pray, the reason we go to church, the reason we have the sacraments, the reason we serve the poor, the reason we love and forgive others ... they all have the same ultimate goal, which is our salvation. Even our first pope, St. Peter, says so in **1 Peter 1:9**. So will you let God be your God this and every day?

MOVING FORWARD

Write out the name "Jesus" or a simple phrase like "Let God Save You" on an index card. Tape it to your bathroom mirror or put it at your bedside or as a bookmark in your Bible. Basically, put it somewhere you will see it each day this Advent, and when you do see it, stop and pray, "Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to save me."

DAY TWO

GABRIEL

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin.

– Luke 1:26-27

GOD MOVED

This was an angelic mission unlike any in the history of creation. Sure, throughout the Old Testament, we see God's angels at work ... but never like this. Never before had an angel carried such news. Never before had an angel appeared and addressed someone not by their name (Mary) but by a title ("full of grace"). This interaction was different because the soul to whom the angel was sent was so different.

But notice that God was the one to initiate the message, the movement, and the meeting place. Nazareth was a tiny town, so small that it isn't even mentioned in the Old Testament. It seems like an odd place for God to send his great archangel, Gabriel.

Yet, he does.

So, why not send a prophet? We saw dozens of prophets announce God's message(s) in the centuries that preceded this incredible moment. Why send an angel instead? Put simply, because this news could not be entrusted to any human. It was too important. The proclamation that the angel Gabriel carried had cosmic significance, and through it, heaven and earth would be forever altered. God was intentional in how he communicated. It was not just about the destination (Nazareth); it was about the destiny (of Mary). Before heaven came to earth in Bethlehem, heaven came to earth in Nazareth.

GOD IS MOVING

Virtually every nativity set has at least one angel within it and that is on purpose. It's not only a reminder of the angel Gabriel's announcement or of the chorus of angels who appear on Christmas night; it's a reminder that angels — though not often seen — are always at work.

Angels still exist and are far more active than we understand. In fact, right now, your guardian angel is beside you and watching over you. Do you realize that? Do you remember this gift on a daily basis? That's right: **God gifted you and assigned you your very own guardian angel.** We are told in **Matthew 18:10** that our angels are

not only with us but constantly beholding the face of God in heaven. We have a divine escort everywhere we go, guiding us and protecting us and praying for us every minute of the day, even when we sleep.

Now, why would God go to the trouble of giving us such a gift? What does that tell you about how valuable you are to him and how highly he thinks of you?

Every time you see an angel depicted as part of the Nativity scene, remember that it was not a “one-time thing.” No, angelic presence is an all-the-time thing for God's children, and that includes you.

MOVING FORWARD

If you know the Guardian Angel Prayer, make it a point to recite it daily when you wake up and when you go to sleep (and any other time you feel like you need guidance or protection). If you don't yet know it, memorize it. It's a powerful prayer to engage one of your greatest secret weapons.

*Angel of God, my guardian dear,
to whom God's love commits me here,
ever this day be at my side,
to light and guard, to rule and guide.*



LIFE TEEN