



A voice is crying out:

“Clear the Lord’s way in the desert!
Make a level highway in the wilderness
for our God!

Every valley will be raised up,
and every mountain and hill
will be flattened.

Uneven ground will become level,
and rough terrain a valley plain.

The Lord’s glory will appear,
and all humanity will see it together;
the Lord’s mouth has commanded it.”

– Isaiah 40:3-5 (CEB)

Paris. London. New York City. Savannah. Hogwarts. Gotham City. Middle Earth. Narnia. What do all of these places have in common? They have not only been the setting for stories, but as places, real and fictional, they have shaped stories and the characters within them. So what about the places of our Advent and Christmas stories? What might the Biblical wilderness, Bethlehem, the shepherd’s field, and Nazareth reveal? How have they shaped the stories of the Bible, and what do they help to reveal about God and faith?

ADVENT PLACES

NOV 27

THE WILDERNESS

Luke 3:1-20

The Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness before entering the promised land. Elijah spent 40 days and 40 nights travelling through the wilderness before hearing God speak to him. John the Baptist proclaims the coming of God in the wilderness, and baptizes Jesus there. Jesus spends 40 days and 40 nights fasting in the wilderness before facing temptation. We tend to prefer to stay on the paths we know, to avoid getting lost in the wilderness, but what could we learn from embracing the wilderness experiences of our own lives?

Wilderness wanderings create space for us to see and hear our need for God.

NOV 28 – DEC 3

Monday	Read Exodus 16:1-3. What causes you to grumble or complain to God?
Tuesday	Read Luke 4:1-13. What temptations do we face in the empty or difficult times (wilderness times) of our lives?
Wednesday	Read 1 Kings 19:1-21. Where have you faced “wilderness experiences”, times when you struggled or didn’t see a way forward, and what pulled you through?
Thursday	Read Deuteronomy 8:1-5. How can wilderness experiences create space to learn and experience God’s presence and direction?
Friday	Read Isaiah 40:3-5. How has God used wilderness experiences to teach you, assure you, or bring you comfort?
Saturday	Read Luke 3:1-20. Why do you think the announcement of the coming ministry of Jesus happens by John in the wilderness?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Share a time in your life when you felt lost. What did you do?
2. What are examples of “wilderness experiences” in our lives today?
3. At what times in your life have you felt like you were “wandering in the wilderness?” What did it feel like to be there?
4. In your “wilderness experiences”, did you wander for a while, try to find your way through alone, or stop and cry out to God? What keeps us from crying out to God?
5. Pastor Brian shared that sometimes we need “wilderness experiences” to help us let go of idols and see our need for God. How has this been true in your experience?

FaithFit Challenge:

Read Isaiah 40. Using the words of Isaiah as a guide, write what this passage says to you in your own words.

ADVENT PLACES

DEC 4

NAZARETH

Luke 4:14-30

By most scholarly accounts, Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, was just a small, out of the way place when Jesus lived there. Outside of the Bible, there are no accounts of its existence until the 3rd century. So Jesus didn't come from a center of influence or power. He came from nowhere. And even his own little hometown would later reject Him. What might this teach us about God? About our assumptions and expectations? About faith? **God invites us to look for Good News in unexpected places.**

DEC 5-10

Monday	Read Luke 1:26-38. Of all the couples all over the world, why do you think God chose a couple from Nazareth to be the parents of Jesus?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 2:19-23. Do you think growing up in a small, out of the way place like Nazareth impacted the life of Jesus? If so, how?
Wednesday	Read John 1:43-51. What does Philip's reaction to the hometown of Jesus teach us about God? About humanity?
Thursday	Read Luke 4:14-30. Why can the message Jesus brings be challenging when we share it, even to those who know us the best?
Friday	Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. According to the Bible, why does God choose the lowly, the weak, and the despised?
Saturday	Read Isaiah 57:14-15. Why do you think God values humility and contrition?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. In what place did you spend the majority of your childhood? How did that place and the people there shape who you are?
2. If you wanted to get a message started that would reach the entire world today, where would you go to start sharing the news?
3. Why do you think God chose to send an angel to a couple in Nazareth?
4. What might the prominent role of Nazareth in the Advent and Christmas stories teach us about God and faith?
5. What value does humility have as a follower of Jesus?
6. How have you seen God show up, or the Holy Spirit at work, in unexpected ways and/or unexpected places?

FaithFit Challenge:

Make a list of people you know who may feel disconnected, excluded, or who are going through a difficult time. Pray over the list and ask God to show you one person you could bless during the Christmas season.