



28 November 2025

The Advent journey begins

Sunday is the first day of Advent, the season for reflection and preparation for joyfully celebrating Christ's birth.

We know the celebrating has already begun, and we are bombarded with countless encouragements to ...

“Celebrate the season with the Delights of Christmas — a festive feast of sweet and savory indulgence.”

To “embrace the spirit of the season with our curated collection of Christmas delights.”

To “bring warmth, tradition and indulgence to your festive celebration.”

To “let your heart light up brighter than the holiday lights.”

But for some of us the delights, warmth and light may be hard to think about, let alone find and embrace right now.

Naomi, in the Old Testament book of Ruth, experienced that. When she returned to Bethlehem after years of being away, she told those who welcomed her,

“Do not call me Naomi [her name has the idea of being pleasant or lovely]; call me Mara [meaning bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (1:20-21).

Recall how she arrived at this point. She lived some 1,200 years before Christ in Bethlehem with her husband and two sons. A famine struck. They left the family farm and went southeast out of Israel into Moab where conditions were better. At first it went well. Both sons married, although not to Jewish women. Then disaster struck again. First, Naomi's husband died. Then both of her sons died—neither son having any children to provide for or continue the family. So Naomi decided to take the most reasonable course of action. Since the famine was over in the Bethlehem area she would go back home. She was welcomed by her long ago friends, but she was not filled with light, joy and celebration. She was home, but brokenhearted, sad and bitter, hopeless.



You may feel like that now as you experience dark and difficult days.

We know the account ends with God sustaining and restoring her. Her daughter-in-law Ruth married and had a son, Obed, who was the grandfather of David the king. God enabled her to replace mourning with celebrating not just by changing her circumstances. He responded to her faith as she acknowledged God's sovereignty and faithfulness in the tough time, and then praised God for His grace.

Naomi also had an honest view of herself. When she returned to Bethlehem she did not put on a plastic smile and pretend that everything was wonderful. She expressed her feelings honestly and appropriately to God and others.

Then too, Naomi lived out the love that God had shown her. She cared for her daughter-in-laws sacrificially, including advising them that she thought they would fare better in Moab than as non-Jewish women in Israel. She thanked and praised them for being kind and supportive to her. She did not criticize them. She was bitter, but she didn't get stuck there. She didn't draw away from others and into herself. She still showed her support and love to others.

As well, Naomi supported her daughter-in-laws' choices, both Orpah who chose to stay in Moab and Ruth who chose to go with her back to Bethlehem.

Then also, Naomi's love in action involved planning for them, protecting them, looking out for their future. She was the one who directed Ruth so she would meet her husband Boaz, who then provided for their future.

God tells us through king David, "Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Yes, sometimes the dark nights and weeping go on longer than we think we can bear, but God's promise is true, "a shout of joy comes in the morning."

Whatever your circumstances and feelings are today, follow Naomi's example of a solid faith in and love for God and others. Keep moving forward, reflecting and preparing to celebrate Christ's birth.

Pastor Lyle