

HEIDI HAVERKAMP



ADVENT
in NARNIA

Reflections for the Season

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INTRODUCTION



Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. —1 Corinthians 3:18–19a

I read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* for the first time when I was in elementary school. I loved to stare at the cover, a picture of the four children in fur coats, framed by a forest with the White Witch’s castle looming behind them. They looked like kids I might know. The lamppost was like lampposts in my Chicago neighborhood, but it stood by itself in the distance. The castle told me that this was a fairy tale, which thrilled me. It was both familiar and unfamiliar: a whole world on the other side of a closet door.

C. S. Lewis said that he began to write the *Narnia Chronicles* because an image appeared in his mind: a faun with an umbrella and his arms full of packages, walking under a lamppost in the middle of a snowy forest. He also saw a queen riding in a sleigh and a majestic lion. As he wrote, “At first there wasn’t anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord.”¹ The novel unfolded as a work of imagination and faith.

When we deeply trust something we can’t see, we must use our imaginations. Consider Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things

not seen.” Too often, Christianity may seem to be a known quantity. We can take its radical values for granted and see Jesus as a cliché instead of our Savior. Lewis, by placing Christianity into another world, makes it unfamiliar again. He gives us the chance to feel a newfound wonder at the depth of God’s love, the power of Christ’s grace and the totality of his sacrifice, and the wonder of a world infused with the Holy Spirit. We all can use a spiritual wake-up call like this, whether we aren’t sure Christianity can mean anything to us or whether it means everything.

Entering Narnia, though, means becoming a little bit “foolish,” as St. Paul would put it. Reading children’s literature might be embarrassing for adults or teenagers, but it can be a deep source of wisdom (and fun); as Lewis wrote, “When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly.”²

In 2013, I first thought to use *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* for an adult Advent series at my church. We had a wonderful time reading the book; watching scenes from one of the movies; discussing spiritual imagination, temptation and repentance, lions and beavers, witches and fauns. It was such a rich experience that I wanted to share it with other individuals and churches as a way to observe Advent and prepare for Christmas.

Lewis’s first book about the land of Narnia is a perfect fit for the season of Advent. The snow, a glowing lamppost, the children, the waiting for the return of a savior, and the visit of Father Christmas make it a natural reading partner for this time of year. The novel very quickly moves from Advent into Christmas, then Good Friday and finally to Easter; so, for the most part, the reflections and activities

in this book focus on the first half of the novel, which is most pertinent to Advent.

There is a whole theological world Lewis created in the Narnia Chronicles (for more on this, read Rowan Williams's book *The Lion's World*), and while I do refer to *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Last Battle*, I focus on the characters, images, and themes of the first novel.

You can read along in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as you do this Advent study; relevant chapters are listed at the start of the reflections that focus on the novel. Other devotions reflect primarily on Scripture or make only general reference to the novel. Reading the novel in its entirety is not necessary to understand or enjoy the reflections. You can watch one of the movie versions, if you'd prefer (see appendix A for details on the three most commonly available). Either strategy will help you get the most out of the reflections, the discussion sessions, and the "Narnia Night" for families.

However, my purpose in writing this book is not to help you to know Narnia better but to know God better. Rowan Williams wrote about Lewis, "The reader is brought to Narnia for a little in order to know Aslan better in this world."³ I hope that by spending a little time in Narnia this Advent, you will get to know Aslan—and Jesus Christ—better, and to prepare for Jesus' birth at Christmas all the more richly for it.

—Heidi Haverkamp
Bolingbrook, Illinois



WEEK ONE



1. THROUGH THE WARDROBE



Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. —Luke 13:24

To follow along in the novel, read chapter 1.

Four children, two sisters and two brothers, have been sent from their home in London to the countryside to escape the bombing of the Blitz during World War II. They're in a new place, living apart from their parents, with two adult caretakers who are mostly absent.

One rainy day, when they're exploring the big, lonely house where they're staying, Lucy, the youngest child, finds a large wardrobe all by itself in an empty room. She's curious; she opens the door and climbs in, pushing her way through the fur coats hanging inside, and then she's in the middle of a snowy forest.

When I was little, I would walk into closets with my arms in front of me, hoping to feel cold air and hear snow crunching under my feet. Maybe you did too. Something in me longed to find a world more like the one I wanted to believe in than the one that was around me.

Walking into Advent can be like walking through the wardrobe. Depending on where you live, Advent might even be like Narnia—cold, with snow under your feet. But Advent is like Narnia in more ways than weather. It's

a magical time, set apart from ordinary time: we listen to special music; we decorate our homes, streets, and clothes; we eat particularly delightful and delicious foods. We experience a heightened sense of excitement and expectation. Those expectations are not only about the giving and receiving of gifts but also about Advent and Christmastime offering us a glimpse of a world that's kinder, more just, and more joyful than the one we usually experience.

To truly enter that world, as Christians, the door we must walk through first is Christ. Snow, greenery, music, cookies, and gifts can all help us imagine the kingdom of God, but no matter how big and beautiful the wreath, walking through our front door is not going to transform our lives the way walking through the door of Jesus himself will. It is he who will lead us to that world we long for, where pain is turned to love, and death to life.

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of your traditional Advent activities and preparations are most meaningful to you? Have you ever reflected on how they reveal something of Jesus to you? For instance, his love, grace, or care for the poor?
2. The image of Christ as “the narrow door” is sometimes viewed as an escape from the people we disagree with or as a way to make ourselves feel more special than others. How can that “door” be an invitation instead of a barrier?

2. THE LAMPOST



The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. —John 1:5

To follow along in the novel, read chapter 1.

We expect to see evergreen trees, snow, and glowing lights in Advent: outdoors, in stores, and on Christmas cards. Lucy Pevensie, however, is surprised to see a light glowing through snowy trees when she walks through the wardrobe. She's so curious about that light that she spends ten minutes walking to reach it.

A lamppost in a forest is a familiar image if you know the Narnia books, but it's meant to be surprising. Lewis leaves it unexplained in this novel, but in a later one, we learn that it grew from an earthly lamppost, which was used as a weapon by the White Witch then transformed into this lonely but shining light by Aslan (in *The Magician's Nephew*). Mr. Tumnus tells Lucy it's the boundary between Narnia and "the wild woods of the west." In the last chapter, the children come upon the lamppost and don't recognize it, but they notice how old it is and that it is dwarfed by the ancient trees around it.

This lamppost is a living thing. No one lights it, no one extinguishes it, and it burns without fuel. The White Witch's winter hasn't snuffed it out. It is a boundary, but

also a promise that Aslan can make broken things new and alive. It is a beacon in the face of the dark, cold spell that lies on the land.

An Advent wreath and Christmas lights shine with the same kind of light. Jesus is the Light of the World, shining in a darkness of despair, sin, and death. A Light that, like the lamppost, was there in the beginning with God. A Light that was broken and made new in the Resurrection. A Light that shines through the darkness on all people. A Light that beckons us to be curious and to come and see.

Questions for Reflection

1. What special lights have you placed around your house this season, if any, to remind you of the “light coming into the world” (John 1:9)? If you haven’t hung any lights, are there places you might like to, if you had the time or resources?
2. Anne Lamott writes, “Lighthouses don’t go running all over an island looking for boats to save; they just stand there shining.”⁴ Does this also describe the Light of Christ? Why or why not?
3. What metaphor would you use to describe the light of Christ in your life this season? It might be glowing brightly, faintly, or off in the distance. Try writing a poem or prayer with that metaphor or with the metaphor of the lamppost.