

Advent's "why"

By [Thomas Daniel](#)

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"I'm a Christian," said my oldest daughter, seven-year-old Miriam.

"Really?" I replied. "So what makes you believe that you are a Christian?"

"Because I love God, God loves me, and I know Jesus came back to life after dying on the cross."

This was an incredibly exciting moment for me as a parent, because it was the first time that Miriam had initiated a conversation about her personal spiritual beliefs. Her statement of faith included all the important pieces.

Yet in the back of my mind I hesitated, because Miriam was not articulating *why* these things are important if one is to be a Christian. She was not articulating *why* she (much less all of creation) needs a savior.

She's only seven, and I know these reasons may become clear with age. But it raises an important question: is the "why" all that important in declaring oneself to be a Christian. If so, how are we challenging our congregations to engage it this Advent?

Simon Sinek has [a wonderful TED talk](#) where he examines the importance of "why." He examines how great leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Jobs, and the Wright Brothers inspired others because they first answered the question "why" before moving on to questions of "what" and "how." Sinek claims that most people do not understand just how important it is for any cause to focus on answering the "why" question first.

I believe that the 21st-century mainline church has struggled to clearly articulate why we need a savior. We don't want to sound too harsh or judgmental, especially around Christmas time. Yet the truth remains, and we are reminded today by the words of John the Baptist: we have all wandered away from God. Not just the politicians. Not just our supervisors at work. Not just our financial institutions. All of us.

John goes on to make it clear that unless we repent of this wandering, we are not going to be able to fully approach God—even when that God is a cooing baby in a manger. John's words force us to engage *why* we need a Savior to be born this Christmas.

As parents, grandparents, congregants and pastors, how do we bring the "why" back into Advent, so that on Christmas Day we can truly celebrate the birth and promised return of our savior?