



THE CHRISTMAS TREE

ORNAMENTS OF HOPE, GRACE, FAITH, AND LOVE

ADVENT

2022

ADVENT

Advent: from the latin word *adventus*, meaning 'coming' or 'arrival'.

Advent is a season to reflect and remember that God has come to be with his people. It is a celebration of the coming of Jesus on that first Christmas. But it is also a time of waiting in eager anticipation for the Second Coming of Jesus.

In the church calendar, Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas as a time to prepare our hearts and minds in the lead up to Christmas Day.

This time of year is no doubt a busy season for many reasons. Which makes it all the more important for us to slow down, deliberately and intentionally, to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

*"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them. "*

Luke 1:68

This Advent season, may you reflect on the wonderful news that God has come to be with us, and the sure and certain hope that Jesus will come again to fulfil all that God has promised for us.





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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Advent guide contains a number of elements to grow your hearts and affections in this season.

Bible Reading Plan

A daily Bible reading plan that will take you through the promises of the Old Testament, the fulfillment in the New Testament, and the encouragement to look at our hope for all eternity. Set aside a short time each day to read, reflect and pray in response.

Weekly Devotionals

We recommend you take time out one day during the week for an extended time of reflection, either personally or with your family.

Included in these devotionals are:

Short readings and reflections.

Questions to ponder.

Song lyrics

You may wish to find an audio version to listen to and assist your reflection.

Ideas to guide your prayers.

Activities for families to engage in this season together.



READING PLAN

A selection of Bible Readings to help us
remember the promises of God.

Nov 28	Romans 13:11-14	12	Colossians 1:15-20
29	Luke 3:1-6	13	2 Peter 3:3-13
30	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	14	Mark 14:60-65
Dec 1	Isaiah 2:2-5	15	Jeremiah 33:14-17
2	Isaiah 9:1-7	16	Micah 5:2-5
3	Isaiah 11:1-9	17	Ezekiel 34:11-31
4	Isaiah 11:10-16	18	Zechariah 8:1-8
5	Isaiah 39:5-40:11	19	Zephaniah 3:14-17
6	Isaiah 52:1-12	20	Isaiah 7:10-17
7	Isaiah 61:1-4	21	Matthew 1:11-17
8	Galatians 4:4-6	22	Luke 1:26-38
9	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	23	Luke 1:39-56
10	1 Thessalonians 5:1-11	24	Matthew :18-25
11	1 Corinthians 15:20-28		







- wait -

WEEK 1

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made that has been made.
In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
John 1:1-5*

Reflection

Advent often draws our minds to the nativity. The stable; the star. The shepherds; the angels; the magi. But Advent begins much before the Christmas story.

In Genesis 3:15, God promised a saviour who would redeem humanity from the fallenness of sin that had begun in the garden. An offspring who would crush death. With anticipation, Genesis 4 introduces us to Cain and Abel. Could they be the saviour promised? Only a few verses later we see this is not the case.

In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him and his descendants. And so they continue to wait.

For hundreds of years, God promised a saviour would come. He promised he had not abandoned his people. He would come for them. And his people trusted him. It was a long wait. But the wait proved absolutely worth it.

Simeon had worked in the temple in Jerusalem all his life. He had been waiting for this promised saviour—this Messiah. And as Jesus is brought to the temple, he praises God, saying:

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the
sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.” Luke 2:29-32*



Here, the Word of God—the promises of God—became flesh. Real. Tangible. Present. The promise had arrived. All that God’s people had been waiting for had come. A light in a dark world. Bringing life to all humankind—Jews and Gentiles alike.

Everything was made through him. And he had come to restore all things. Just as he intended. And just as he had promised.

Response

What is one hope you have for yourself, your family,
or your community this Advent season?

God often uses seasons of waiting to strengthen our faith.
If you are in a season of waiting, what might God be teaching you?

Song—Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free
From our fears and sins release us
Let us find our rest in Thee
Israel's strength and consolation
Hope of all the earth Thou art
Dear desire of every nation
Joy of every longing heart

Born Thy people to deliver
Born a child and yet a King
Born to reign in us forever
Now Thy gracious Kingdom bring
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone
By Thine all sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

Prayer

Praise God that he is faithful to his promises.

Thank God for his mercy in sending Jesus.

Pray that we would learn to wait patiently on God.

All powerful God,
increase our strength of will for doing good
that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming
and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven,
where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Family Activity

Plan an Advent related activity for your kids for later in the week that you know they will enjoy. It might be looking at Christmas lights, decorating Christmas cookies, or watching a Christmas movie.

Let them know you've made plans, but do not tell them what the plan is. Remind them of your promise, perhaps providing hints. Allow their expectation and excitement to grow. Use the opportunity to remind them how God's people waited excitedly and with much expectation for God's promised king.



- look -

WEEK 2

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:14

Reflection

Advent is a time for both looking back and looking forward.

We look back to the time of the birth of Immanuel—God with us. Where God had seen the state of sinfulness in the world, and determined to bring salvation. Jesus—which means ‘God Saves’—had come to dwell with his people. For hundreds of years, God’s people had waited patiently for a saviour. And now he had come. With all the glory of God the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus accomplished that salvation through his death on the cross. We now look forward to a new coming. A second coming. Where God will bring to completion all that he has promised. With eager expectation, we cry ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ (Revelation 22:20).

In 1861, Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled ‘The Two Advents of Christ’. He contrasts the two ‘comings’ of Jesus:

“The difference appears once more in this; he will come again for a very different purpose. He came the first time with, “ I delight to do thy will O God.” He comes a second time to claim the reward and to divide the spoil with the strong. He came the first time with a sin offering ; that offering having been once made, there is no more sacrifice for sin. He comes the second time to administer righteousness.”

The first coming of Jesus points us to the second coming. In his first coming, he came to dwell and walk amongst his people. He dwells with us presently through his Spirit. And in his second coming, he will come to dwell with us for all eternity.



Response

How does the first coming of Jesus provide you with hope and confidence?

How ought the second coming of Jesus shape our perspective and devotion?

Song—O Come O Come Emmanuel

O come O come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear

Rejoice rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

O come Thou Dayspring come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

O come Thou Wisdom from on high
And order all things far and nigh
To us the path of knowledge show
And cause us in her ways to go

Rejoice rejoice Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

O come Desire of nations bind
All peoples in one heart and mind
Bid envy strife and quarrels cease
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace

Prayer

Praise God for his promise to dwell with us.

Thank God for the hope of the second coming of Jesus.

Pray for patience and confidence for when waiting is difficult.

God of power and mercy,
open our hearts in welcome.

Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy,
so that we may share his wisdom
and become one with him
when he comes in glory,
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Family Activity

After dinner one night, read the Christmas story - this week from Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:26-45, 2:1-20) - together as a family.

You could then share stories with your kids about when they were born: what were you expecting as parents before they were born? How did you feel when you first saw them? What was it like holding them as a baby for the first time? What were the exciting things about having a baby? What was a bit scary?

Finish by thanking God for the lives that he gives us, for the life of Jesus, and for God helping us to know him like we know our own parents.



- hope -

WEEK 3

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby,
keeping watch over their flocks at night.
An angel of the Lord appeared to them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.
But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news
that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David
a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

Luke 2:8-11

Reflection

Good news is wonderful to hear—especially when you are among the first to hear it. And it is all the more special when you hear it personally from someone—when you hear their voice, see their face, and share the moment with them. A vast difference to being a spectator of an announcement on social media.

The Christmas story surprises in many ways, not least of which is the way in which this wonderful news was first shared with the world. An angelic presence appeared; not to kings, scholars or priests—but to poor shepherds on the fringes of the city.

The promise that God's people had waited so long to see was finally coming. And God showed just how precious and treasured this promise was by revealing it to lowly outcasts.

Shepherds were not wealthy. They moved around with their flocks, and were rarely trusted. While some people feel confident and assured of themselves because of status, wealth or power, others are deeply aware of their desperate need for a saviour: the weak, the poor, the oppressed. Shepherds fell firmly in this latter group.

And when this marvellous news was presented to them, they were compelled to act. They didn't care what others would think. This news was too good to keep to themselves. They ran to Bethlehem to see this baby in the flesh. And then they spread the word to everyone they could.



Waiting for the coming of God's king is a humbling act. It causes us to look beyond ourselves. And those who are willing to be humbled will discover that this good news of great joy is available to all people. A saviour no money can buy, no power can control, and no one group are uniquely privileged to access. A saviour for all people.

Response

How does Jesus' first coming give you reason to feel joy this Advent season?

In what ways can we be humbled by awaiting Jesus' second coming?

Song—Come to Us O Lord

O living Word
Please come and dwell in us
Lord wipe away these tears
O ancient Son, so long foretold
We're desperate souls, draw near

And we will stand
Securely in the strength of the Lord
Every heart will surely come and adore
The Great I Am

O our Shepherd King
Please come and dwell with us
To fields of grace
Lead on

And we will stand
Securely in the strength of the Lord
Every heart will surely come and adore
The Great I Am

We need You now
Break our chains by Your glory and power
Make us captive to a holy desire
Come to us O Lord
Come to us O Lord

Prince of Peace, Emmanuel
Lord draw us close, unto Thyself
King of kings, God's chosen One
We need you now, to Thee we run

And we will stand
Securely in the strength of the Lord
Every heart will surely come and adore
The Great I Am

We need You now
Break our chains by Your glory and power
Make us captive to a holy desire
Come to us O Lord
Come to us O Lord

Prayer

Praise God for his mercy and kindness.

Thank God for his unconditional love for all people.

Pray that we would humbled to wait patiently for Jesus to return.

Lord God,
may we, your people
who look forward to the birthday of Christ
experience the joy of salvation
and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Family Activity

Write a letter of thanks to someone who has been influential in your own faith. You may like to have each family member share their story, and how they are thankful to God for that person. You may also choose to send the letter to encourage the recipient.

Take some time to pray together and give thanks to God for the people he has used to bring us the good news of Jesus. Ask for courage to do the same.



- come -

WEEK 4

*At that time they will see the Son of Man
coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near.
Luke 21:27-28*

Reflection

The Aramaic word *maranatha* means ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’ It was an early prayer of the church, and appears at the end of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. It may seem strange that the early church prayed ‘Come!’. After all, Jesus had only just come in the flesh through his birth in Bethlehem. And he had not long left them as he ascended into glory after the resurrection. Yet they knew they were still awaiting the completion of every promise being fulfilled. Jesus would come again in all his glory, and all the more spectacularly than his first coming.

Among the final words in the Bible, we read in Revelation 22:17:

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

In the magnificent description of Jesus returning to dwell with his people in the final chapters of Scripture, the invitation to ‘come’ is turned on its head. Jesus invites us to come to him. Come and find rest. Come and find peace. Come and be nourished and comforted.

Advent is a season where we look forward and long for Jesus to come again, just as we look back to those who waited for his coming the first time. We have a confidence and expectation he will come again because he has come before. Because we know God is faithful to his promises.

And as we desire for Jesus to come again, at the same time, we adopt an attitude of coming to him. In humility and thankfulness, we prepare to come to Jesus, and to be awed by his majesty, his grace and his love toward us. Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus.



Response

In what ways do you feel a longing for Jesus to come again?

How can you adopt an attitude of coming to Jesus as a daily expression?

Song—I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

I heard the voice of Jesus say
Come unto Me and rest
Lay down thou weary one
Lay down thy head upon My chest
I came to Jesus as I was
Weary and worn and sad
I found in Him a resting place
And He has made me glad
I heard the voice of Jesus say
Behold I freely give
The living water thirsty one
Stoop down and drink and live
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life giving stream
My thirst was quenched my soul revived
And now I live in Him
I heard the voice of Jesus say
I am this dark world's light
Look unto Me thy morn shall rise
And all thy day be bright
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star my Sun
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done

Prayer

Praise God that he has come to dwell with his people.

Thank God for the rest, comfort and nourishment we find in Jesus.

Pray the news of Jesus will be recognised as good
by a world that desperately needs it.

Lord,
fill our hearts with your love,
and as you revealed to us by an angel
the coming of your Son as man,
so lead us through his suffering and death
to the glory of his resurrection,
for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Family Activity

This week, set aside some time to create and decorate homemade Christmas cards together as a family. Send them to some of your neighbours, friends or family whom you might not ordinarily do so. You might like to include a personalised message that points to the good news of Christmas.

You could take some time to pray for each family as you make them.

OTHER RESOURCES

Music

Find these albums on your preferred streaming platform.

Advent by Young Oceans

An album of songs that reflect on the themes of advent.

Songs of Christmas by Young Oceans

An album of both reimagined classics and modern songs.

Lowly by Garage Hymnal

An album of Christmas songs.

Other

The Advent Project

<https://theadventusproject.wordpress.com/>

A collection of art, music, poetry and advent reflections.

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