

Advent

at Bible Center

Preparing our hearts for Christmas



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The King is coming! The Lord Jesus Christ has come and will come again. This is my hope, your hope, and the hope of the Church whom He purchased with His blood.

This Christmas devotional is designed to help us celebrate Jesus' first coming and look forward to His second coming. Traditionally, this season has been called "Advent," formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival."

This Christmas, may God help us remember, rejoice, watch and wait for Jesus, our highest treasure and greatest good!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Matt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senior Pastor
Bible Center Church

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HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

The Advent season officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, which is December 3rd this year. There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on tradition and background.

Many people use an Advent calendar, typically made up of 24 “windows” containing Scriptures, stories, poems or gifts, to count down the days until Christmas. As each window is opened and the final day draws closer, expectation increases (as seen in the movie, *National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation*). This reminds us of the hopeful yet anxious waiting God’s people experienced as they longed for the promised Savior to come.

Another popular tradition is marking the progression of the season through an Advent wreath made up of five candles. This symbol is borrowed from the emphasis throughout Scripture of Jesus Christ being the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9; 8:12). Each week a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas Eve or Day to represent Jesus’ first advent. Through this theme of ever-increasing light penetrating the darkness, we see a picture of the gospel.

Regardless of the tradition, Advent is a significant time in the life of the church. It’s an opportunity for believers to remember God’s promise to send One who would overcome sin and death forever. God promised a Savior, and He kept that promise perfectly.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide contains four weeks of material, with both a study to complete on your own as well as a plan to help families talk about the Advent narrative together. The family portions are designed to work for families of all shapes and sizes and do not require extensive preparation.

Either portion of the guide can also be used to facilitate discussion within your Community Group or with other good friends.

This study walks through the narrative of Jesus' birth. It begins in the Garden with God's promise of a Savior and ends with an eager anticipation of Jesus' promised return. In the middle, God shows His unmistakable faithfulness in sending the promised Rescuer. We see His love for the lowly and outcast as He proclaims the news of His Son to the shepherds. We marvel at His heart to see all nations come and worship His Son through the Magi's journey.

Even if you know the Advent narrative well, don't rush past what God has for you in this season. For many, this may be the first time to consider all that God is saying through the birth of His Son. For others, it will be an opportunity to rediscover the way God intimately works in the details of life for His glory and the good of man.

For all of us, may this season be one marked by hope, expectation, remembrance and worship. The King has come and is coming! There is much to celebrate.

A NOTE FOR FAMILIES

Advent is an opportunity to pause and reflect on the birth of Jesus. For families, this time of year can be filled to the brim with activities and obligations. Before the calendar begins to overflow, set aside a few minutes to consider what you want this season to be for your family. Then make a plan so that a time intended to remember and celebrate doesn't get swallowed up by lesser things.

To help toward that end, we have provided a family portion each week that will help you create intentional time to talk about Jesus. If you choose to use the Advent wreath as the guide suggests, put it in a special, visible place in the house to serve as a reminder of Jesus' coming. There is also a song each week for your family to sing or listen to together.

The family portions are written with preschool and elementary-aged children in mind. If you have older children, consider having each person work through the "Personal Study" section in place of reading the family commentary, and then come together to talk about what you learned.

WEEK 1: HOPE

Sunday, December 3 – Saturday, December 9

This week centers on the longing of God's people for the coming Messiah. They longed for the fulfillment of God's promises, deliverance from exile, and the establishment of God's Kingdom.

As you go through this week, how can you identify with the prophets of Israel? How do the prophecies of the coming Messiah give you hope? Which parts of them are inspiring or encouraging for you?

DEVOTIONAL READINGS

- Sunday 12/3: Isaiah 52:7-10
- Monday 12/4: Jeremiah 33:12-16
- Tuesday 12/5: Isaiah 42:1-9
- Wednesday 12/6: Micah 5:1-4
- Thursday 12/7: Isaiah 40:1-5
- Friday 12/8: Isaiah 40:6-11
- Saturday 12/9: Isaiah 9:1-7

PRAYER

Almighty God, we, like Israel in exile, long for your coming. Daily, we feel the searing pain of this broken world, but we know this isn't the end. We watch for your light on the horizon. We listen for your voice on the wind. Give us hope when we grow weary. Grant us strength when we grow weak, for you are our hope now and forevermore. Amen.

RESPONSE

What is one hope you have for yourself, your family or your community as you begin the Advent season? How will you make that a reality?

Pray for yourself and those around you, asking God to open your eyes and heart to what He has for you this Advent season.

SONGS OF THE SEASON

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

WEEK 1: HOPE (FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME)

Sunday, December 3 – Saturday, December 9

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud...

Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: "It will not always be so! I will come to rescue you! And when I do, I'm going to do battle against the snake. I'll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I'm coming back for you!" And he would. One day, God himself would come.

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:6

Reflection

Briefly talk about what it means to be rescued from something. When might you need to be saved from danger? Whom would you call upon to rescue you? For example, if there were a fire, whom would you call to save you? What are rescuers typically like?

Have an adult read the commentary below...

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no sin, pain, sickness, death or sadness. God created Adam and Eve to live in His perfect world with joy and peace. But Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God. When they sinned, God's perfect world broke. There was a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. Because God is perfect, He cannot be near sin. So, Adam and Eve were separated from God. The punishment for their sin would also be placed on all humans who were born after Adam and Eve.

Ask: Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, each of us needs to be rescued from something. What do we need rescue from?

But before Adam and Eve left God's perfect Garden, God made a promise. God promised to send a Rescuer, someone to save Adam, Eve and mankind from the punishment of sin. He promised to send Jesus!

God did not send Jesus to rescue His people right away. God waited thousands of years to send the Rescuer. During that time, God's people faced many hard things. While they waited, God gave them hints and clues about how Jesus would come, what He would do and what He would be like. These hints, written in Scriptures by prophets, would help God's people wait. The verse from Isaiah that we read together after lighting the Advent candle was written while God's people waited those thousands of years for the Savior.

During that time, God made other promises to His children and kept those promises. Each time God made and kept a promise, it helped His children trust that He would be faithful to His promise to send Jesus to rescue them from their sins.

Ask: What do you think it felt like for God's people to wait for the promised Rescuer to come?

Some days, God's children waited patiently. Some days, they waited with tears and frustration. Some days, they wondered if God had forgotten His promise. But God continued to whisper it over and over again as His children waited. And one day, when no one was expecting it, Jesus would come.

God shows us many things about what's He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is the Deliverer, that He rescues His children, in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for His goodness and mercy in sending Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

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.

Family Activity

Parents, make plans for a fun Christmas activity next week that you know your children will love. Perhaps it's seeing a Christmas play or movie, decorating cookies together or seeing Christmas lights.

At the end of your family Advent time, promise your kids that you are going to do something special together to celebrate Advent—something they will love—but don't tell them what or when. As the days go by, remind them of your promise and give them hints as to what it might be. Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of God's promise to send a Rescuer and the anticipation God's people felt as they waited.

Additional Activities

1. Create an Advent wreath to use throughout the Advent season.
2. Create a nativity scene to use throughout the Advent season. If you would like to make this activity last the entire season, consider creating just the stable, animals and Mary and Joseph this week.

WEEK 2: PEACE

Sunday, December 10 – Saturday, December 16

The second week of Advent's readings focus on the immediate prophecies surrounding Jesus' birth. These accounts tell of God's divine interjection into the lives of ordinary men and women, changing the course of their journey forever.

Where has God intervened in your own story? What do we learn about Jesus through these prophecies? As each account anticipates the coming Christ, what do you anticipate in the promises of the Kingdom of God?

DEVOTIONAL READINGS

- Sunday 12/10: Luke 1:57-79
- Monday 12/11: Matthew 3:1-12
- Tuesday 12/12: Luke 1:26-38
- Wednesday 12/13: Luke 1:39-45
- Thursday 12/14: Luke 1:46-56
- Friday 12/15: Matthew 1:18-25
- Saturday 12/16: Luke 1:5-17

PRAYER

Most Merciful God, so often we expect great things to happen with fireworks and parades, but we know that you are the God of the still, small whisper. You came into the world innocent and vulnerable and changed everything. Give us eyes to see the subtle miracles of our every day. Give us willing hearts to adapt and change at your quiet prompting, that we may walk in your way and delight in your will. Amen.

RESPONSE

As you make your list of people to buy gifts for, include someone who would never expect to receive a gift from you. Think of the delight you feel in blessing them and consider the love in God's heart as He sent His Son to die for sinners. In prayer, thank God for His goodness in sending a Savior. Confess places where your confidence in His faithfulness is weak and ask Him for increased trust, belief and hope.

SONGS OF THE SEASON

O Holy Night

Silent Night

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

WEEK 2: PEACE (FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME)

Sunday, December 10 – Saturday, December 16

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's mercy in sending a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light last week's candle and a second candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud...

And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. -LUKE 2:3-7

And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his wonderful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby son. -THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below...

Do you remember the promise we talked about last week? God's promise to send a Rescuer? His promise to send Jesus? Well, Jesus came, just like God said He would! After thousands of years of waiting, on an ordinary night, Jesus came. God gave His people hints and clues about how Jesus would come. He told them that Jesus would come from Bethlehem, be a Ruler and bring peace. Many expected a soldier; some expected a politician. No one expected a baby. But that's how Jesus came.

Ask: If you had been an Israelite, how would you have expected the promised Savior to come?

Mary and Joseph lived in a town called Nazareth. One day, the king gave an order that everyone was to go back to their hometown to be counted for something called a census. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way to the town of Bethlehem, where Joseph's family was from. When they got to Bethlehem, the town was full of other travelers, and there was nowhere for Mary and Joseph to stay. So they found a stable to sleep in. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and Jesus, the Savior, was born.

Ask: How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when they finally got to Bethlehem and realized they had nowhere to stay? Do you think God knew that they felt this way?

Jesus, the King of heaven, left His perfect home to be born a baby to a young man and woman. He became fragile and helpless. His room that night was a stable—dirty, smelly and full of noisy animals. His bed was not kingly and luxurious; it was a feed box that animals ate out of. Mary had to wipe old, rotten food out of the manger and cover it with poky straw before she laid her tiny baby in it.

Ask: Is a stable the place you would expect the Savior to be born? Why do you think God decided for His one and only Son to be born there?

But everything that happened that night was exactly what God had planned and promised. Jesus came, just like God said He would. God saw that we needed to be rescued from sin. He cared about us in our need, and He acted. He sent Jesus. The events of that night, in that stable in the little town of Bethlehem, would change the world forever.

God shows us many things about what's He's like in the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is compassionate—that He sees, cares and acts when His children are in need—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending Jesus to be born as a baby who would save us from our sins.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to “Away in a Manger.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

Family Activity

This week, keep the promise you made to your family during last week's family Advent time. Talk about how you fulfilled the hints and clues you gave them. Discuss the experience of waiting: What was it like to wait? What was it like to finally experience what you had been

waiting and hoping for? Remember together God's faithfulness in sending a Savior. It happened just as He said it would.

Additional Activities

1. Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the baby Jesus piece and add it to the set.
2. Create a set of ornaments that show the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus' birth and their fulfillments in the New Testament.
3. Create a nativity scene out of Legos.
4. Use a sock and stuffing to create a baby Jesus doll, wrapped in fabric scraps. Make a manger for the doll out of a paper sack. Let your preschooler care for baby Jesus and have him/her use it to retell Jesus' birth story throughout the week.

WEEK 3: JOY

Sunday, December 17 – Saturday, December 23

The readings for the third week of Advent are filled with the joy of Jesus' birth. Light enters the world and goes mostly unnoticed, but those who see the brilliance of the baby Messiah cannot help but worship.

What strikes you about these moments of praise? How has God used some seemingly insignificant moments to change everything in your journey? Where do you see God's light shining this Advent?

DEVOTIONAL READINGS

- Sunday 12/17: Luke 2:8-20
- Monday 12/18: Matthew 2:1-12
- Tuesday 12/19: Luke 2:21-35
- Wednesday 12/20: Matthew 2:13-23
- Thursday 12/21: Luke 2:41-52
- Friday 12/22: John 1:1-18
- Saturday 12/23: Luke 2:1-7

PRAYER

O Holy Trinity, where you are light shines brightly, joy flows freely, and love runs deep into the cracks of broken hearts. Free us from the burden of our worries, the weight of our fears, and oppression of our shame, that we might worship with free and full hearts. Help us sing praise with abandon as children to our Father, for you are worthy of all praise, glory, and honor. Amen.

RESPONSE

Write a letter to someone who was instrumental in your coming to faith. Whether or not you can actually send them that letter, communicate how the Lord used them to change your heart and life. In prayer, praise God for loving the weak, despised and lowly and showing them His glory. Thank Him for the person or means He used to share the gospel with you, and ask Him for the boldness and faith to do the same.

SONGS OF THE SEASON

Joy to the World

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Angels We Have Heard on High

While Shepherds Kept Their Watch by Night

WEEK 3: JOY (FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME)
Sunday, December 17 – Saturday, December 23

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how God showed His glory to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first two weeks and a third candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud...

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

LUKE 2:8-12

Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud—except it wasn't a cloud, it was angels... troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!"

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

LUKE 2:15-17

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below...

As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus' birth. And He began with an unusual group of people.

Ask: Whom would you expect God to tell first that the promised Rescuer had come?

Kings, queens and religious leaders were not the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus. Instead, God told the most unimportant of people His good news first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals, thieves and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the Rescuer had come.

And the way they heard that good news was nothing short of amazing. While the shepherds watched their sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel that appeared to them was no baby with wings and a harp sitting on a cloud, like some stories might describe. No, this angel was a warrior of the Lord. And he shone with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of Himself.

Ask: How do you think the shepherds reacted when they saw the angel of the Lord?

The angel told the shepherds not to be afraid. God did what He had promised—He sent Jesus to rescue God’s people from their sins. God was making peace between Himself and sinners through Jesus.

Upon telling the shepherds the good news of Jesus’ birth and how to find Him, the angel was joined by thousands of other angels who began singing about the greatness of God. That dark, quiet night sky was filled with a beautiful, blinding light and roaring song that left the shepherds forever changed. Once they had heard the news, the shepherds were desperate to go and find Jesus and see the marvelous thing that God had done.

Ask: What is the greatest news someone has ever shared with you? What did you want to do in response?

So the shepherds abandoned their sheep and raced to Bethlehem. Once they saw baby Jesus there in the manger, they left the stable and began telling everyone they saw the good news that the Savior had come. God used this group of men—men everyone despised—to tell the world that Jesus had come. As Jesus would do throughout His life, God was coming to sinners to show them the way to salvation.

Ask: How can we be like the shepherds? As a family, whom can we tell that Jesus came to save sinners?

God shows us many things about what’s He’s like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is glorious—that He shows His greatness and worth—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending angels to share the good news of Jesus' birth to sinners just like us.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"
Christ, by highest heav'n adored:
Christ, the everlasting Lord;

Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the favored one.
Veil'd in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, th'incarnate Deity:

Pleased, as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail! the heav'n born Prince of Peace!
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die:
Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”

Family Activity

One night this week, go out caroling as a family. As you visit homes of neighbors, friends and family, sing songs of praise about the birth and salvation of Jesus. It might be easiest to start at the home of someone you know who loves Jesus as you do. Sing praises to God and invite them to join you at the next house.

Make sure you visit at least one home of people who do not love and trust Jesus. Just like God showed grace and love to the lowliest of sinners, share the good news of Jesus’ birth with someone who does not know God. Maybe that person will hear the good news and will believe in Jesus.

Additional Activities

1. Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the shepherds and angel pieces and add them to the set.
2. Spend time imagining what the “glory of the Lord” shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props and loud singing.
3. Draw or paint what you think the night sky might have looked like when the angels appeared to the shepherds.

WEEK 4: LOVE

Sunday, December 24 – Saturday, December 30

The readings for the fourth week of Advent explore Jesus' identity, his work among us, and his second coming – all of which are rooted in God's love for the world. Jesus came as a herald for and first fruits of the Kingdom of God, bringing life, light, and love. The ripples of his ministry have grown into waves that have touched every corner of the world. Now we long for the culmination and fulfillment of his work in his second coming.

Where do you experience the tension of living in the now-but-not-yet of the Kingdom of God? During this Advent season and into Christmas, how can you celebrate the love of God? How can you be an agent of that love in your family, neighborhood, or workplace?

DEVOTIONAL READINGS

- Sunday 12/24: John 3:16-21
- Monday 12/25: Luke 2:1-20 **See the next section, "For Christmas Day."*
- Tuesday 12/26: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10
- Wednesday 12/27: Matthew 24:37-44
- Thursday 12/28: John 14:15-21
- Friday 12/29: Revelation 21:1-5
- Saturday 12/30: Luke 4:14-20

PRAYER

Almighty God, in a lowly manger you came into the world and changed everything forever. Your healing touch and unfailing love brought sight to the blind, strength to the lame, and freedom to the oppressed. Now we wait expectantly for the day when there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying or pain; the day when you make all things new. So we pray, come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

RESPONSE

Think of someone you know who is actively involved in reaching the nations with the gospel. Take time this week to pray for them by name and write them an encouraging email or letter. In the next few weeks, notice how many people from other nationalities you see in the rhythm of your everyday life. Ask the Lord to give you faith and favor in building relationships and sharing the gospel.

SONGS OF THE SEASON

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Go! Tell it on the Mountain

We Three Kings

WEEK 4: LOVE (FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME)
Sunday, December 24 – Saturday, December 30

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how only God is worthy of all glory. Consider sitting outside as you talk about the journey of the Magi, drawing particular attention to the stars in the night sky above you. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first three weeks and a fourth candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud...

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."
MATTHEW 2:1-2

The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three wise men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the king God had promised David all those years before.
THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.
MATTHEW 2:11-12

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below...

The first people God told about Jesus' birth were the shepherds. He used a spectacular mass of angels to shout from the skies that Jesus had come. But the angels were not alone in proclaiming the good news that night, and the shepherds were not the only people to learn of the Rescuer's coming.

That same night, God placed a special star in the sky, a bright body of light that announced the birth of the King. Some men in a faraway country saw this star. These men

were called Magi. They were educated men who studied the skies and nature. Most scholars believe these men came from Persia, or modern-day Iran.

There was something very special about these men. Throughout the Bible, God promised to send a Rescuer to save the Israelites from their sins. But these Magi were not Israelites. They were Gentiles. That means they were not from Abraham's family and likely did not know and worship God. But that night, God did something that no one expected. By placing that star in the sky, God showed unbelievable mercy toward all people. In showing the Magi that Jesus, the King of heaven, had been born, God was extending salvation to people of all nations.

When the Magi saw the special star that God had placed in the sky, they left their home country to find Jesus. Their journey took a long time. They did not arrive in Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. In fact, it may have taken them up to two years to reach the place where Jesus was. The Bible tells us that when the Magi found the place where Jesus was living with Mary and Joseph, they entered the house, bowed down and worshiped this small child who had come to save sinners. They then gave Jesus precious, costly gifts.

Ask: Why do you think the Magi were willing to leave their homes and families and travel for such a long time to find Jesus? What did they know and believe about Him? Why do you think they brought baby Jesus such special, expensive gifts?

Throughout the Advent story, we see that God is generous. He sent a company of angels to shout the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, and He put a special star in the sky to guide men from a faraway country to Jesus. He desires that all people know, love, trust and obey Him. And God promises that one day men, women and children from every tribe, tongue and nation will worship Jesus. God will rescue people from all over the world, and we will worship Him as He deserves.

God shows us many things about what He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is worthy—that only He deserves all glory—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to praise God and ask Him to show people of all nations the good news that Jesus came to save sinners.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to "O Come All Ye Faithful." As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him born the King of angels;
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God in the highest:
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Family Activity

Spend time this week looking at a map of the world. Play a game where you name a country and your kids try to find it. Talk together about what it would be like to live in a different culture with a different language and customs. Point out places in the world where people aren't free to openly worship Jesus or talk about Him.

Look together at the list of missionaries on our church website. Pick one person or family and pray for them by name. If possible, write them an email or note of encouragement.

Additional Activities

1. Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the Magi pieces and add them to the set.
2. Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus' birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.

JUST FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Monday, December 25

DEVOTIONAL READING

- Luke 2:1-20

PRAYER

In your own words, pray and thank God for His incredible faithfulness in sending Jesus to save His people from their sins.

RESPONSE

Spend the day enjoying God's good gifts with family and friends. Don't worry – no family is perfect and our celebrations fall far short of our future celebrations in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Try to pace yourself, look for the good, and ignore the bad. Look for God's gifts throughout the day.

If the day is extra difficult for you emotionally, consider spending it investing in someone else's Christmas. Make an impact in someone else's life. Be a Christian they can't live without this Christmas.

SONGS OF THE SEASON

Silent Night

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME

Set aside ten minutes to talk about God's faithfulness in sending a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one person light the candles from the first four weeks, remembering together what you've learned about God's faithfulness during Advent. After reading Luke 2:1-20, have another person light the fifth candle—the Christ candle.

Song

Sing or listen to “Silent Night” together. As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy infant, so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love’s pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

Silent night, holy night
Wondrous star lend thy light
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

APPENDIX A

Additional Activities for Families

The hope and goal for believing parents in raising their children is to point them to the gospel of Jesus continually in hopes that God will save them. This can seem like an overwhelming task at times. Where do we start? What do we do? How do we point our children to Jesus in the everyday rhythm of life?

To help answer these questions, we ask parents to consider three areas of life as they think about family discipleship: time, moments and milestones.

Time – Create intentional time in the rhythm of your family’s life to think about, talk about and live out the gospel.

Moments – Capture and leverage moments in the course of everyday life for the purpose of gospel-centered conversations.

Milestones – Recognize and remember significant spiritual milestones of God’s work in the life of your family.

In an effort to help families focus on time, moments and milestones during the Advent season, we have given additional activities in each of these areas.

Activities to help you create intentional time:

1. Make a set of Christmas ornaments to remind you of the prophecies of Jesus’ birth and their fulfillments.
2. Spend time imagining what the “glory of the Lord” shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props and loud singing.
3. Make a Christmas card for someone who does not love and trust Jesus. Wish them a merry Christmas and tell them that Jesus came to save sinners!
4. Consider a way your family can serve in the community during the Advent season. (Such as: adopting an angel and shopping for them together, visiting an elderly care center and singing carols for the residents, serving a meal at a homeless assistance shelter, taking dinner to someone you know who is lonely or in need)
5. Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus’ birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.
6. Play hide-and-seek and talk about how Jesus came to seek and save the lost.
7. Thank God for sending Jesus.

Ideas for capturing teachable moments:

1. Give hints about Christmas gifts that your children will be receiving to build anticipation in their hearts. Remind them of the “hints” God gives us in Scripture of what Jesus’ birth and second coming will be like. There is no greater gift than loving and trusting Jesus!
2. Have a kid-friendly nativity set for your children to play with. As they play, retell the Christmas narrative.
3. As you’re out shopping, look for opportunities to remind your children that all material things are temporary and will ultimately never satisfy them. The only lasting hope is Jesus.
4. When you see Christmas lights, talk about which lights and houses are your favorites and why. We are attracted to lights because we are made for the light. Talk with your children about how these lights remind us of Jesus, the best and perfect Light of the World.
5. If carolers come to your house, remind your children of the angels who appeared to the shepherds proclaiming the good news of Jesus’ birth.

Ways to recognize and remember milestones:

Milestones are significant moments in the life of a family. Not every family will have a milestone to remember this Advent season. If your family does, take time to recognize the work that God is doing in your family and worship Him.

1. Celebrating a new family member – If another person joined your family this year, there is much to celebrate. Families grow through the birth or adoption of a child, marriage or taking in a person who needs love and support. Often, when a new person joins a family, they do not have many Christmas ornaments to add to the family tree. Make or purchase a special ornament for your new family member to recognize and remember God’s goodness to bring you together.
2. First Christmas without a family member – Celebrating can be hard when your family is grieving the loss of a loved one. Take time to help your child remember and talk about that special person if they need to. Help them to remember the good times and memories they have about that person. If your loved one was a believer, talk about the beautiful reality that they are now with Jesus. Hang an ornament or put out a special decoration that reminds your family of that person. Be honest with God about your sadness and ask Him to make your hearts joyful again.

APPENDIX B
Recommended Resources

Below are several albums and books that will bless your time of reflection, study and worship.

Behold the Lamb of God

ANDREW PETERSON

A beautiful, clever and creative telling of the Advent narrative—from the shadows of Passover through the longing of Israel to the not-so-silent night when Jesus was born. For those who enjoy story told through song.

Christmas Songs, Headed Home, Comfort and Joy, Glad Tidings, All the Earth Rejoice

FOLK ANGEL

If you're looking for joyful singing, new takes on Christmas classics and music to drink your coffee to, look no further. For those who enjoy folk with a hint of bluegrass and R&B.

Treasuring Christ in Our Traditions

NOEL PIPER

Addressing traditions beyond just the Advent season, this book provides great ideas for establishing family rhythms and rituals that honor Jesus.

The Advent Book

JACK AND KATHY STOCKMAN

This simple and beautifully illustrated book walks through Advent with a series of doors, one to open each day, revealing the story of Jesus' coming.

Messiah

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

Composed in 1741, Handel's Messiah tells the story of Christ, beginning with Isaiah's prophecy of salvation and ending with the resurrection. Part 1 recounts Jesus' first coming. For those who enjoy classic music.

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas

EDITED BY NANCY GUTHRIE

A collection of short Advent reflections, this book would serve as an excellent resource for daily devotional reading during the month of December.

Songs for Christmas, Silver and Gold

SUFJAN STEVENS

Two unique collections of traditional Christmas favorites (with a twist) along with original tunes that will leave you feeling like you've just been to a Christmas circus. For those with an eclectic taste in music.

APPENDIX C

Additional Scriptures for Study and Reflection

Advent is about Christ and His two comings—the first in humiliation, the second in glory; the first in condescension, the second in exaltation; the first for forgiveness, the second for judgment. The passages below speak to the person and work of Jesus in His first coming and the promise of His second. May the Lord strengthen, encourage, awaken and restore us as we behold Him in His Word.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.
ISAIAH 11:1-5

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.
MATTHEW 1:18-25

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the

darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
JOHN 1:1-5, 14

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.
COLOSSIANS 1:15–22

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–11

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

HEBREWS 1:1–4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the

throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

REVELATION 21:1-5

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

REVELATION 22:17

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

REVELATION 22: 20

Prophecy and Fulfillment

Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of all that was spoken through the prophets about the Messiah. Below is a list of some of the Messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus' coming. They serve as a reminder of God's perfect faithfulness to do all that He has promised.

The Son of God – Psalm 2:7 → Matthew 3:17; Luke 1:32, 35

The seed of woman – Genesis 3:15 → Galatians 4:4

The seed of Abraham – Genesis 17:7; 22:18 → Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16

The tribe of Judah – Genesis 49:10 → Luke 3:33; Revelation 5:5

The seed of David – Psalm 132:11; Isaiah 9:6 → Acts 13:23; Romans 1:3

Born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2 → Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-6

Born of a virgin – Isaiah 7:14 → Matthew 1:22-23

Called Immanuel – Isaiah 7:14 → Matthew 1:22-23

Children of Bethlehem slain – Jeremiah 31:15 → Matthew 2:16-18

Being called out of Egypt – Hosea 11:1 → Matthew 2:15

Being anointed with the Spirit – Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1 → Matthew 3:16; John 3:34

Being a Prophet likened to Moses – Deuteronomy 18:15-18 → Acts 3:20-22; John 6:14

A Priest in the order of Melchizedek – Psalm 110:4 → Hebrews 5:5-6

Public entry into ministry – Isaiah 61:1-2 → Luke 4:16-21, 43

Ministry beginning in Galilee – Isaiah 9:1-2 → Matthew 4:12-16, 23

Entering publicly into Jerusalem – Zechariah 9:9 → Matthew 21:1-5

A Shepherd for God’s people – Ezekiel 34:1-31 → John 10:1-18

**This booklet has been adapted from free resources provided by The Village Church in Flower Mound, TX and Vanderbloemen Search Group in Houston, TX. Not intended for purchase.*



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