

The 2022 Advent Guide

*A Seasonal Guide
for Families & Groups
in Advent*



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What is Advent?

When is Advent?

Advent is the period preceding the Christmas season and is the beginning of the Church year. It begins on the Sunday nearest November 30, the feast day of St. Andrew the Apostle, and covers four Sundays. Because the day it begins changes from year to year, so does the length of each Advent season.

What is it all about?

The word advent, from Latin, means “the coming.” And so, Advent is a time of anticipation, a time of preparation, and a time of remembrance. Advent and Christmas are often confused, though. The confusion arises because most North Americans begin celebrating Christmas long before it arrives. Waking up the day after Thanksgiving Day, folks start singing Christmas carols, and putting up Christmas trees. It’s called “the most wonderful time of the year” and a jolly old time it is with its lights, family times, and cheer. But meanwhile, at the local Anglican church, you find a different atmosphere. Suddenly, you have left behind the smell of pine and the celebration of Christmas and entered into a world of Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and powerful angels announcing future events. A subdued tone fills the music, minor keys abound, and a Christmas tree is (often) nowhere to be seen. Christian families find quiet moments lighting candles in the Advent wreath, and children use Advent calendars to count the days until Christmas.

Advent is about preparation,
not performance or perfection.

What is Advent?

Why do we celebrate it though?

Advent's tone and focus is subdued for an important reason. Each major festal celebration (Christmas and Easter) are prefixed with a season of preparation. The movement of the Church Year assumes that we will better understand and experience these feasts if we spend time in reflection and meditation upon why we need them in the first place. We delve into the prophets and John the Baptist because they tell us of a time when the messiah had not yet come. It's as if they take us back to the times of anticipation and longing. They remind us of how dramatic and powerful the Gospel story of God becoming a man really is. They prepare our minds and hearts for the joy of the Incarnation (God becoming flesh). And so Advent is necessarily a reflective, anticipatory season.

How did it all begin?

It probably has been observed since the fourth century. Originally, it was a time when converts to Christianity readied themselves for baptism.

During the Middle Ages, Advent became associated with preparation for the Second Coming. In early days, Advent lasted from November 11, the feast of St. Martin, until Christmas Day. Advent was considered a pre-Christmas season of Lent when Christians devoted themselves to prayer and fasting. The Orthodox Eastern Church observes a similar Lenten season, from November 15 until Christmas, rather than Advent.

Many Christians still view Advent as a season to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus. In the last 50 years, however, it has also come to be thought of as a time of anticipating the Nativity and the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day.



How to Use this Guide

Do Not Do It All

Everyone should feel free to participate at your own pace. If you've never done a plan like this before or you have small kiddos, just read part of the daily readings (like the Gospel or the Jesse Tree) or simply participate in a weekly activity.

Permission to Do It All

You can do all the pieces of this book. Jump in and study. Feel free to dive deeply into all the daily readings, activities, and reflections.

Commit to Something

It doesn't necessarily matter what habit you choose during this season of Advent, just pick something and commit to doing that for four weeks. Let the Scriptures speak to you consistently. Let the anticipation of our King enrich your longings.

Reflection Pages

As you make your way through the readings each week, keep track of notes, quotes, thoughts, or questions that come up.

Relax

This Advent Guide is a tool to spend time in the stories of Advent, not as a rule book for how your days have to look.

Daily Reflection

With each daily reading, we want these icons to prompt reflection.



What do I learn about God?



What do I learn about people?



What do I feel like the Holy Spirit is teaching me?



How can I share this with someone?

Wreaths

If your family made an Advent Wreath, use it throughout the season as a visual symbol of your spiritual practice. Light one of the four colored candles each day during your readings (often weekly purple, purple, pink, purple), saving the white candle to light on Christmas Day.

Gathering

Pages entitled "Gathering" walk you through a weekly time designed to be used by groups. What qualifies as a group? Life Groups of all ages, families with kids, couples, groups of friends or neighbors or just you and your dog. Questions and follow-up activities for both children and adults are included in this section.

Worship With Us



Share the Songs of the Season with Us.

Spotify is a free music streaming service. If you have a smart phone, download the App, otherwise you can simply listen on an internet browser.

We've built two playlists in Spotify to invite you to worship with us from home, on the go, or wherever you find yourself throughout the week. This is meant to be a tool that calls to mind some of the songs we sing together on Sundays in Advent and prepare your heart for the coming King. Listen straight through or shuffle the songs.

Some of these will be very familiar and others brand new. Take time to really listen to the words of these songs. Reflect on them and let them sink in deep.

With new songs!

For our general audience check out this playlist:

HOLYCROSS.NET/ADVENTSONGS

For our families with kids check out this playlist:

HOLYCROSS.NET/ADVENTKIDS



What is the Jesse Tree?

Jesse Trees have been used by Christians since medieval times to help tell the story of the Bible from creation all the way to the birth of Jesus. In the Middle Ages, many people could not read, but were still hungry to know the story of the Bible. So artists created ways to represent Scripture that didn't require words! Stained glass, carvings, tapestries and other symbolic representations told Bible stories that everyone could enjoy. The Jesse Tree was one such symbol used to tell the story of Scripture.

The Jesse Tree can be thought of as Jesus' family tree. Before Jesus was born, God crafted a lineage of ancestors in the faith who would foreshadow and celebrate the baby who would eventually be born to save the whole world.



One of Jesus' ancestors was Jesse, the father of the most beloved king of Israel, King David. A prophecy about Jesus from the book of Isaiah 11:1-4 says:

*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;*

Christians believe that Jesus is that “righteous branch” that has been birthed from the family of Jesse. And Jesus himself taught that to truly understand the whole of Scripture, we must understand that not only this prophecy, but indeed the whole Old Testament was one big story that looked forward to Jesus' arrival. As we understand the physical and spiritual lineage of Jesus, we come to understand more about how God prepared the way for his most precious gift to us—his beloved Son.

Throughout the Advent season, read daily about how each person fits into the Jesse Tree, and see if over time you and your family can tell the story from beginning to end. Children (or crafty grown ups!) can color each character's ornament during the daily reading to deepen their experience. It really is the greatest story ever told!



WEEK 1 HOPE

MATTHEW 24:29-44



Advent Prayer

Light your first weekly candle.

Let us pray: God of Abraham and Sarah, and all the Patriarchs of old, you are our Father too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth, to make our hearts ready and to place our hope in you. Help us today and every day to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your hope with others. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. *Amen.*



Background

Advent is a season of comings—and not just of one but of two. The first is the coming of our Lord in humility in the manger at Christmas, and the second his coming in great glory at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

Our call in this season is one of preparation, expectation and anticipation for both of these comings, but in our passage here in Matthew 24 it is the second which is in view.

The chapter begins by Jesus saying that the temple's stones will no longer be there in the future but will be overturned. This jarring thought provokes the disciples to ask a double question: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" They are asking about the destruction of the temple, and about Christ's return, AND about the signs which will accompany these momentous events.

Jesus' response is full of a kaleidoscope of dramatic images: darkening sun, stars falling, "and the powers of the heavens shaken." It will be dramatic in every sense.

Two parts interest us. One is that Jesus says the exact day is not known, not even by Him. Any day could be the last day of history. Jesus could come this afternoon. Part of living as an Advent Christian is taking that thought to heart.

The second idea is the refrain to stay awake and be ready. The dictionary says ready means 'completely prepared or in fit condition for immediate action or use' and we all know that the more important the event is, the harder it is to be prepared. To prepare for a dinner is one thing, for a wedding is something altogether different.

How will you prepare yourself this Advent to be completely ready for our Lord? Is there anything we are doing or thinking we should drop or add? Questions worthy of much pondering.

GATHERING



Tell the story



Retell the story as a group



Read the Scripture



Life Group Questions

Use these questions to guide conversation around this week's Scripture.

- What did you learn about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit in this story?
- What do you learn about people in this story?
- How is God speaking to you personally through this story?
- How can you use this passage to disciple others?



Weekly Family Activity

Use these questions and activity to process this week's Scripture with your kids.

Today's Gospel passage can be a little confusing...and even a little scary! Jesus is telling his friends that there will be many mysterious and difficult things that happen before He returns to Earth a second time. So why was this passage chosen when the theme for this week of Advent is "hope?" What is so hopeful about a lot of mysterious and scary things taking place in the world?

Well, people who love Jesus have hope because of what Jesus says will happen after the mysterious and hard things... Jesus will come back to Earth and He promises to "wipe away every tear from our eyes." Jesus promised that the hard things are just a sign that our happily ever after is just around the corner. He promised us that we don't have to worry about the hard things because we have hope in the promise of His wonderful return.

As a family, get out some paper and coloring supplies. Draw a big circle to represent our world, and then think of all the bad and sad things that are in the world—sickness, pollution, bullies... you get the idea. Be as specific and personal as possible. Draw each one on the planet as you think of it. Then take a red crayon/marker and draw a big X through each one to show how Jesus will take away every bad and sad thing that we currently face in our world. What will the world be like without all those bad and sad things in it? How does that give your family hope?



Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer



NOVEMBER 27, 2022

INTENTIONS



Gospel

John 1:1-18

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.



NOVEMBER 28, 2022

INTENTIONS



Space

As we kick off this season of Advent and begin heading into Christmas, we want to help you get your habits and rhythms established. These habits are not to be a law that you simply follow, we want them to be guidelines that create space in your daily and weekly rhythms so that you might be able to better hear from and know Jesus throughout this season.

That does not simply happen by accident. It happens by intentionally making space. For these first few days of Advent, we want to help you intentionally make space.

Today we will focus on how you make space. Take out your calendar and see where in each week you can plan in time to spend with Jesus. Is this daily in your morning quiet time, over your lunch break, each evening after your kids go to bed, or during dinner time or as part of your bedtime routine as a family? Make a plan for how you (and possibly your family too) will regularly spend time learning about Jesus through these Advent readings.



NOVEMBER 29, 2022

INTENTIONS



Generous Hearts

As we kick off this season of Advent and begin heading into Christmas, we want to help you get your habits and rhythms established. These habits are not to be a law that you simply follow, we want them to be guidelines that create space in your daily and weekly rhythms so that you might be able to better hear from and know Jesus throughout this season.

That does not simply happen by accident. It happens by intentionally making space. For these first few days of Advent, we want to help you intentionally make space.

Today we will focus on serving. On page 46-47 of this book we have included a section titled "Generous Hearts." Turn there now. Read the introduction section and the ideas to serve that we have included. Which of the opportunities would you like to be part of? Now, pull out your calendar and make an actual plan! It may be as simple as adding a few items to your grocery list or planning a time to talk with one of our staff members about how you can serve.

NOVEMBER 30, 2022

INTENTIONS



Simplicity

In the Psalms, we hear the Lord say, “Be still and know that I am God.” The Christmas season is all about God, and yet this is probably the time of year when we have the least stillness, the least quiet, the most overwhelming schedules. We want to be generous, so we fill up our carts on Amazon. We want to cherish our families so we make plans to travel. We want to relax and have fun so we make festive plans. Are any of these things wrong? No! Jesus did all of them (well, minus the Amazon cart.) And yet the cumulative effect of all of these commitments can actually lead us away from God’s heart of joy and celebration. We end up checking off all the holiday boxes, but missing the heart of why we are celebrating in the first place.

As you head into the holiday season, ask God what you can say “no” to. Do you need to go to every party? Does everyone on your list really need a gift? What can you subtract from your planning so that you can truly cherish the Lord in this season? Before you say yes to anything this year, say a prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to clear away the non-essentials so you can enter more fully into the heart of the season—so you can wholeheartedly enjoy the love He came to give.



Gospel

Luke 1:1-4

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.



DECEMBER 1, 2022

GOD THE FATHER



Daily Readings Genesis 1, 2



God the Father:

At the very beginning of our world, God the Father created everything. He created light and dark, sea and sky, sun and moon, and creatures of all kinds. He saved the best for last and created humankind in His own image. On the seventh day God rested and enjoyed his creation. He loved everything that he had made so much that one day many years later, he would send his Son to be a part of the world he had made.



Gospel

Luke 1:5-7

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.



DECEMBER 2, 2022

ADAM & EVE



Daily Readings Genesis 3



Adam and Eve:

Adam and Eve were the first man and woman that God ever created. They lived in a perfect and beautiful garden that God made for them to take care of and enjoy. There was only one rule: they could not eat from the tree that grew at the center of the garden. They disobeyed God and ate from it anyway, and so brought sin and death into the world. But God made a plan to undo the damage they had caused, by someday sending Jesus to make the world right again.



Gospel

Luke 1:8-13

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.



DECEMBER 3, 2022

SETH



Daily Readings Genesis 5:1-6



Seth:

Seth was Adam and Eve's son. He grew up outside of the beautiful garden that Adam and Eve could no longer inhabit. But even in the broken world in which he lived, he still was made in God's image. Being made in God's image means that humans are created to be reminders of God's goodness and love. Someday God would send His son Jesus to be the perfect representation of God's image. He would not only remind us of God's love, but "Immanuel-God with us."



Gospel

Luke 1:14-17

¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."



REFLECTIONS

Fill this page with any notes, quotes, thoughts, or questions that came up through the readings this week.



WEEK 2 PEACE

MATTHEW 3:1-12



Advent Prayer

Light your first and second weekly candles.

Lord Jesus, Light of the World, the prophets said you would bring peace and save your people from trouble. Give peace in our hearts at Christmastide. We ask that as we wait for you to come again, that you would remain present with us. Help us today, and every day to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your peace with each other. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. *Amen.*



Background

Our second reading confronts us with the person who appears every year in Advent, John the Baptist. He comes out of the desert with the white heated awareness that God is about to arrive in history and he must enable people to be prepared.

To do this, he calls people strongly to repentance. To repent as we have noted before involves three turnings: away from things and thoughts in the past I am called to give up, around in the present so that I face a different direction, and then finally toward a new direction in the future with an amended life.

Repentance makes no sense unless we see ourselves in the light of God's call to be holy as he is holy, which means we fall so very far short in who we are and what we do.

John's arresting language—"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"—is meant as a stark reminder of who are apart from the saving blood of Christ in the gospel. In the words of CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, "we are not simply imperfect creatures who need improvement: we are rebels who must lay down our arms."

In our prayers in response, let us ask God to enable us to see ourselves for the full rebels we are, such that only his coming and death on the cross can save us. Lord, grant us Advent penitence and the fresh wind of your grace this week.



Tell the story



Retell the story as a group



Read the Scripture

GATHERING



Life Group Questions

Use these questions to guide conversation around this week's Scripture.

- What did you learn about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit in this story?
- What do you learn about people in this story?
- How is God speaking to you personally through this story?
- How can you use this passage to disciple others?



Weekly Family Activity

Use these questions and activity to process this week's Scripture with your kids.

Today's Gospel passage is about John the Baptist. He was Jesus' cousin. Do you have any cousins? Do your cousins wear clothes made out of camel hair? Well, Jesus' cousin did! John lived out in the wilderness and was spreading the news that the Rescuer who God's people had been waiting for was coming... SOON!

John was baptizing people in the river with a "baptism of repentance." That meant that people were admitting that they needed God's forgiveness—admitting they couldn't be perfectly good no matter how hard they tried. But John said that someone was coming (Jesus!) who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. What did that mean? Why do we talk about it this week when we are thinking about peace?

John knew that repentance—admitting our sin to God—was only the first step in bringing true peace to our hearts. He knew that when Jesus came and filled our hearts with the love of the Holy Spirit, we would have TRUE peace because we would be given a brand new heart that loves God.

As a family, log onto YouTube and watch the video "When We Seek Him" posted by Shawna Edwards. These children are singing about how they love Jesus so much that they can't help but try to find Him every day of their lives. But why do they want to spend time with Jesus? The Bible tells us that, "We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19)." What are all the ways that Jesus shows us He loves us? There are so many... does that bring you peace knowing how much Jesus loves you?



Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer



DECEMBER 4, 2022

NOAH



Daily Readings Genesis 6:9 - 8:22



Noah:

Noah was a friend of God. When Noah lived, the earth was filled with people who did not love God and did terrible things to each other. This made God so brokenhearted, that He decided to cleanse the earth of all these terrible things by sending a great flood. God told Noah to build an ark (or boat) to rescue his family, and two of every kind of creature on the earth. Someday God would send Jesus to be a kind of “ark” that would rescue people from the consequences of sin.



Gospel

Luke 1:18-20

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.”



DECEMBER 5, 2022

SHEM



Daily Readings Genesis 9:1-17



Shem:

Shem was one of Noah's sons who survived the flood by being rescued on the ark. Many people believe that Shem was also a famous priest and king who was called Melchizedek. Most priests in the Old Testament offered sacrifices of animals, but Melchizedek offered a sacrifice of bread and wine. Many generations later, Jesus would be our king-priest who would offer his precious body and blood that we celebrate with bread and wine when we take Communion.



Gospel

Luke 1:21-23

²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.



DECEMBER 6, 2022

ABRAHAM



Daily Readings Genesis 21:1-7



Abraham:

Abraham wanted a son, but he thought he was too old. After all, he was 100! But God kept His promise and sent Abraham a son. God promised that He would bless all the people of the earth through the birth of this special son. Eventually, one of Abraham's descendants would be another special son that would bless the whole world—Jesus!



Gospel

Luke 1:21-23

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”



DECEMBER 7, 2022

JACOB



Daily Readings Genesis 32:24-29



Jacob:

Jacob was Abraham's grandson, and God gave him the new name of "Israel." Jacob had 12 sons and those 12 sons grew into the great nation of Israel that still exists today! Eventually, Jesus would come to Earth and pick out 12 men to be His special followers. These followers would grow into a great nation of God's children called Christians, and spread God's love all around the world!



Gospel

Luke 1:21-23

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."



DECEMBER 8, 2022

JOSEPH



Daily Readings Genesis 45, 46



Joseph:

Joseph was one of Jacob's sons. He was his father's favorite, so his brothers were very mean to him. They even sold him as a slave to the faraway land of Egypt. Joseph had a very hard life there, but eventually God made him very powerful...second only to Pharaoh himself! Eventually, Joseph had a chance to repay his brothers for their cruelty. But instead of getting revenge, Joseph forgave his brothers and saved their lives. When Jesus came to Earth, the people around Him were very cruel to Him too. But just like Joseph, He forgave His tormentors and sacrificed His own life for their sake.



Gospel

Luke 1:21-23

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.



DECEMBER 9, 2022

MOSES



Daily Readings Exodus 20:1-21



Moses:

Moses was sent by God to lead God's people out of their bondage to slavery in Egypt. He gave God's people the Ten Commandments—God's special laws that they should follow. Many years after Moses' life, God would send His son Jesus to lead people out of their slavery to sin. And instead of giving them the law on tablets of stone, He would write His law on their hearts.



Gospel

Luke 1:39-45

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,
⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."



DECEMBER 10, 2022

JOSHUA



Daily Readings Joshua 1



Joshua:

After Moses died, Joshua became the new leader of the people of Israel. His job from God was to help God's people make their new home in the Promised Land. Jesus is like Joshua. He leads God's children from a life of wandering aimlessly in the desert, to a life in the "Promised Land" of God's favor, abundance, and blessings.



Gospel

Luke 1:46-50

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation..."



REFLECTIONS

Fill this page with any notes, quotes, thoughts, or questions that came up through the readings this week.



WEEK 3 JOY

MATTHEW 11:2-19



Advent Prayer

Light your first, second, and third weekly candles.

Thank you God for the joy you give us. We ask that as we wait for all your promises to come true, and for Christ to come again, that you would remain present with us. Help us today, and everyday to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your joy with each other. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. *Amen.*



Background

We are now some way into the ministry of both Jesus and his cousin John the Baptist. By this time Herod had ordered the arrest of John the Baptist following his stinging criticism of Herod's marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. While we do not know the exact length of John's imprisonment, most scholars believe it was many months. John was wondering if perhaps Jesus was not the Messiah he believed would come. He sends word via his disciples to get his question about this answered.

I love this story not only because it shows us even John the Baptist struggled, but also because of the gentleness and clarity of our Lord's response. "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

It is an appeal to John's disciples to testify to the reality of Christ's first coming. Notice please the focus of their testimony—transformation. People WERE blind but now see, lepers WERE outcasts but are now healed, the deaf WERE unable to hear but now can, and the poor had no hope but now have heard the best news in the whole world.

To paraphrase Psalm 27—I believe that we are called to look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! In the words of Poet Mary Oliver—pay attention! Be astonished!



Tell the story



Retell the story as a group



Read the Scripture

GATHERING



Life Group Questions

Use these questions to guide conversation around this week's Scripture.

- What did you learn about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit in this story?
- What do you learn about people in this story?
- How is God speaking to you personally through this story?
- How can you use this passage to disciple others?



Weekly Family Activity

Use these questions and activity to process this week's Scripture with your kids.

At the beginning of today's Gospel passage, we learn that Jesus' cousin John (remember him from last week?) is in jail for talking about Jesus so much. John was sad and scared and wondered if Jesus really was the Messiah—God's chosen one who would rescue the world. John sent a message to Jesus basically saying, "Is it really you?" Jesus wasn't mad at John for doubting. He understood that John was discouraged and confused.

Instead of telling John not to doubt, Jesus told his friends to tell John all that they had seen Jesus do. They were to tell John that blind people could see the sunshine, paralyzed people were running around town on strong legs, deaf people were listening to birds sing, and dead people were getting up and having breakfast! Jesus didn't ask people to believe He was God's son with no proof—He did things that ONLY God could do and proved He was just who He claimed to be.

Jesus' friends had what we might call a "testimony"—a personal story of what they had seen Jesus do. This story was why they believed in Him and put their faith in Him. Oftentimes as parents, we have a testimony with the Lord and it just never comes up in conversation with our children. Take some time over dinner to tell your children why you believe in Jesus—what is your story with the Lord? It doesn't have to be dramatic and it's okay if you still struggle with doubt—even Jesus' cousin did! But chances are if you're reading this, then you have a story with God. Tell your kids! Your story with Jesus is one of the greatest witnesses your children will ever have, and it can bolster their own faith in times of doubt.

Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer



DECEMBER 11, 2022

RAHAB



Daily Readings Joshua 2



Rahab:

Rahab was a courageous woman who helped save the lives of two Israelites who were trying to help their people inhabit the Promised Land. She hid them from their enemies, and in exchange the Israelites promised to keep her safe during the upcoming battle. So they would know which house not to attack, Rahab hung a red cord out of her window. That red cord reminds us of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. Just like her cord kept her safe, Jesus' blood keeps us safe from the punishment for our sins.



Gospel

Luke 1:51-53

[... Mary said,] “⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”



DECEMBER 12, 2022

SAMSON



Daily Readings Judges 16:2-31



Samson:

Samson was one of the mighty men of Israel. He was stronger than any other man because he made a special promise with God. As a symbol of that promise, he never cut his hair. His enemies learned that if they cut his hair he would lose his power. They cut his hair and Samson lost his superhuman strength. He told God he was sorry, asked for help and his strength returned. With his strength back, Samson was able to defeat many of Israel's enemies. Jesus is like Samson in that He will someday use His supernatural strength to defeat all the darkness in the whole world, but unlike Samson, He cannot lose this power.



Gospel

Luke 1:54-56

[... Mary said,] “⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” ⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.



DECEMBER 13, 2022

RUTH



Daily Readings Ruth 2, 4



Ruth:

Ruth was Jesus' great- great- great... (you get the idea) grandmother. She was widowed by her Jewish husband and returned with her mother-in-law to Israel and worshipped God with her. Widows generally had no security. It was only when Boaz, the relative of her late husband, married her that she found a future. One day, Jesus would be like Ruth's husband Boaz and welcome people from "every tribe and nation" into the loving family of God.



Gospel

Luke 1:57-63

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹ And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered.



DECEMBER 14, 2022

JESSE



Daily Readings 1 Samuel 16:1-13



Jesse:

Jesse (who the “Jesse Tree” is named after!) was the father of King David. The Bible tells us that Jesse’s family would one day many years later produce another king even more wonderful than David. That future king would of course be King Jesus!



Gospel

Luke 1:64-66

⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.



DECEMBER 15, 2022

DAVID



Daily Readings 2 Samuel 7



David:

David was Israel's most beloved king and was called "a man after God's own heart." Before he was the king of Israel, David was a humble shepherd who took care of his father's sheep. One of David's descendants would be Jesus, the great "Shepherd King" of God's people.



Gospel

Luke 1:67-69

⁶⁷ And [John's] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David..."



DECEMBER 16, 2022

SOLOMON



Daily Readings 1 Kings 3



Solomon:

Solomon was David's son and was a great and powerful king in Israel. He grew so great because God gave him a special gift of wisdom. But in all of his power and riches, he turned away from God. Jesus would be like Solomon in His power and glory, but unlike the human king, Jesus would always love and serve His Father.



Gospel

Luke 1:70-72

[John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying...] ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant...



DECEMBER 17, 2022

ELIJAH

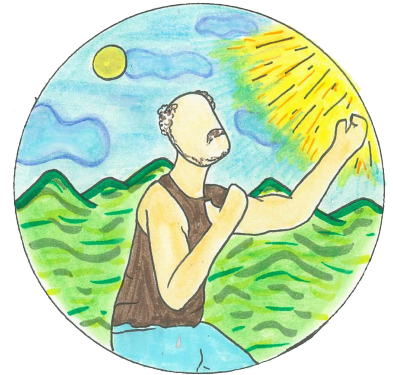


Daily Readings 1 Kings 17:8-24



Elijah:

Elijah was a prophet, or a messenger, that God sent to remind His people to turn their hearts away from sin and back towards His love. Elijah performed many amazing miracles to prove that it was God who sent him. Just like Elijah, Jesus would come to Earth and perform miracles to get people's attention, and hopefully turn their hearts back to God.



Gospel

Luke 1:73-75

[John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying...] ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.



REFLECTIONS

Fill this page with any notes, quotes, thoughts, or questions that came up through the readings this week.



WEEK 4 LOVE

MATTHEW 1:18-25



Advent Prayer

Light your first, second, third, and fourth weekly candles.

Lord God, Your witness John the Baptist grew up strong in spirit and prepared people for the coming of the Lord. He loved your people and baptized them in the River Jordan to wash away their sins. Help us to have the same love that we too would be witnesses to Jesus and spread the good news of his love and grace. As Christmas draws closer day by day, help us to be ready to welcome him into our hearts. *Amen.*

Background



Our final reading on the Sunday closest to Christmas brings us nearest to the key characters in the story, and this year we focus on Joseph. He has been betrothed to Mary which is a covenantal relationship of utmost seriousness.

I wrote a hypothetical play that was performed on a retreat weekend for teenagers, and I staged the scene wherein Mary tells Joseph she is pregnant. It begins with Mary relating to Joseph the visit of Gabriel. They then proceed to get in quite an argument. Joseph insists that it takes three to make a baby—a man, a woman and God. He asks where the man is. There is no man, says Mary. It doesn't matter how hard he tries, he cannot dissuade her.

Joseph will have none of it and walks away. Every time we acted this out, the teens were surprised at the degree of the rupture between Mary and Joseph. We know this to be the case because he resolves to divorce her quietly.

But the God of grace and surprise appears not just to Mary, but to Joseph also. Her angel appears in the midst of daily living, his in a dream.

It is a reminder that the God of the Bible is the Lord of ALL—the world of the conscious, yes, but also the realm of the unconscious about which there is still so much we do not understand.

It was the Lord of all who condescends to meet Mary on one side and Joseph on the other, who comes to meet us this year in Bethlehem. Think of the depth of his Lordship and condescension—that came to meet such people as not only them, but also you and me. And he calls us, too, by name.



Tell the story



Retell the story as a group

GATHERING



Read the Scripture



Life Group Questions

Use these questions to guide conversation around this week's Scripture.

- What did you learn about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit in this story?
- What do you learn about people in this story?
- How is God speaking to you personally through this story?
- How can you use this passage to disciple others?



Weekly Family Activity

Use these questions and activity to process this week's Scripture with your kids.

Today's Gospel passage contains one of the most beautiful words in all of scripture, "Immanuel" which means "God is with us." This was one of the names of Jesus. God didn't remove Himself from our human world—He came down as a little baby, born in a cold and dirty stable to be WITH us.

Oftentimes in the Christmas season, we only hear the true Christmas story—the story of Jesus' birth—at church. So take some time as a family to enjoy the story of Jesus outside the church walls in your home together. The following two films (available to stream or available for purchase on YouTube) are fresh takes on the ancient tale and will remind you of the truest love of all—the love of Immanuel.

"The Star"—For pre-K and elementary kids and their parents. This is the Christmas story told (hilariously and sweetly) through the eyes of the animals who were part of Jesus' birth.



"The Nativity Story"—For middle/high school students and their parents. This beautiful rendition of the Christmas story is a quiet yet powerful meditation on God's miraculous gift of His son.



Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer



DECEMBER 18, 2022

Jeroboam & Rehoboam



Daily Readings 1 Kings 12



Jeroboam and Rehoboam:

Eventually because of sin, the people of Israel split into two kingdoms with Jeroboam and Rehoboam as their two kings. It was a sad fact that God's people had divided into two separate entities, when they had previously always been united under God's rule. Someday Jesus would come and unite not only the descendants of these two kingdoms, but would form one family of His followers from every nation on earth!



Gospel

Luke 1:76-77

[John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying...] ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins...



DECEMBER 19, 2022

ISAIAH



Daily Readings Isaiah 9:1-7



Isaiah:

Isaiah was another of God's prophets that was sent to warn people of the consequences of their sin. Even though eventually Isaiah's warnings about Israel's deserved punishment came true, Isaiah told them that a day was coming many years in the future when God would send hope to His people. God would send His Son to take all of the consequences for sin upon Himself.



Gospel

Luke 1:78-80

[John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying...] ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." ⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.



DECEMBER 20, 2022

JEREMIAH



Daily Readings Jeremiah 1:4-19



Jeremiah:

Jeremiah was also a prophet God sent to Israel. During Jeremiah's lifetime, Israel's enemies destroyed the special place where Israelites worshipped God—the Temple. But Jeremiah told God's people not to lose hope. He told them that one day God would send His son to help us worship God not only in special buildings, but “in spirit and in truth.”



Gospel

Luke 2:1-5

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ 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, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.



DECEMBER 21, 2022

EZEKIEL



Daily Readings Ezekiel 37:1-14



Ezekiel:

Ezekiel was one of God's prophets, too. He told the people of Israel that God was sending a special king who would take tender care of them like a shepherd cares for his sheep. Also, when Jesus was caring for people on Earth, he called himself "The Good Shepherd."



Gospel

Luke 2:6-7

⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ 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.



DECEMBER 22, 2022

JOHN THE BAPTIST



Daily Readings Mark 1:1-12



John the Baptist:

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin! John's job was to tell the people of Israel that Jesus was coming...soon! When John was out telling people about God's son, John spotted Jesus in the crowd. The voice of Father God came down from Heaven and said about Jesus, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The One that God had promised to send since allllll the way back in the days of Adam and Eve had finally arrived! His moment had finally come!



Gospel

Luke 2:8-9

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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.



DECEMBER 23, 2022

JOSEPH



Daily Readings Matthew 1:18–25



Joseph:

Even though God the Father was Jesus' dad, Joseph was the man who raised and took care of Jesus during Jesus' childhood. Joseph faced many hardships and dangers as he took care of Jesus. But God sent an angel to visit Joseph and reassure him that it was his privilege to care for God's treasured son.



Gospel

Luke 2:10–11

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.



DECEMBER 24, 2022

MARY



Daily Readings Luke 1:46-55



Mary:

Mary was Jesus' mother. She also faced danger and risk as the mother of God's son. But God also sent an angel to Mary. The angel assured her that it was a great honor and unbelievable gift to be Jesus' mother. Mary welcomed Jesus into her life, just as God hopes that everyone will do!



Gospel

Luke 2:12-14

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”



DECEMBER 25, 2022

JESUS



Daily Readings John 3:16-18



Jesus:

God's special Son...the one that Israel and the entire world waited for. God loved the world so much that He sent His beautiful Son to die in our place. This tiny little baby that rested in Mary's arms would one day grow up and die on the cross...and miraculously resurrect three days later. In His loving death and powerful resurrection, He would undo all the pain and sin that entered the world through Adam and Eve. He would make "all things new." Amen!



Gospel

Luke 2:15-20

¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



REFLECTIONS

Fill this page with any notes, quotes, thoughts, or questions that came up through the readings or during the services this week.



Generous Hearts

The Season of Giving

Why is Christmas associated with giving? While our modern culture might view the tradition of gift giving as a stress-filled seasonal obligation, this tradition actually has its roots in God's generous heart for us. From the very first pages of the Bible, God's plan to send His Son to redeem humanity was clear. God's lavish gift of His beloved Son has prompted humans to offer their gifts back to Him in response ever since. Every gift given is a sign of the Kingdom of Jesus breaking into today's world.

In the first Christmas story, we see wise men from the East laying gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh at the feet of the tiny King Jesus. Later, during the days of the early Church, St. Nicholas (who formed the basis of our modern day Santa Claus), was known for exhibiting loving generosity towards others. Tradition tells us that St. Nicholas rescued three young women from being sold into slavery by dropping bags of gold through an open window in their home. His generosity saved them from a terrible fate...sounds a little like Jesus, right?

Some families choose to embrace St. Nicholas as a part of their Christmastime celebrations instead of Santa Claus. What's the difference between the two? Well, they both wear pointy red hats and enjoy giving gifts...but one points towards general Christmas cheer (which is great!) and the other points to Jesus (which is way better!). Consider learning more about St. Nicholas and how his life can serve as an inspiration in your life by visiting: <https://theartofsimple.net/st-nicholas-the-real-santa-claus/>. This blog post is chock full of many St. Nicholas related resources for all ages.

No matter where you draw your inspiration for giving gifts, Christian generosity can always be traced back to the generosity we have received from God Himself. Giving thoughtful and meaningful gifts to our loved ones, as well as those in need, is one way to share God's overflowing generosity to us.

On the next page, are some ideas, large and small, that you, your family, or your group can use to give generously. Let them prepare your hearts not only to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas but also for the advent (coming) of the rule and reign of our generous King Jesus.

Outreach Opportunities

HALOS

HALOS (started by a member of Holy Cross!) provides assistance to kinship caregivers in the Tricounty area who have assumed the care of abused or neglected children in their extended family. Over 74,000 of South Carolina's children live in the full-time care of grandparents or other relatives so that they will not have to enter the foster care system.

Kinship caregivers typically have to make the decision to take in a beloved child with little notice. They usually don't have the resources to purchase the car seats, beds or cribs needed to keep the children safe. We can help! Consider purchasing any of the following as an individual, family, or lifegroup. And if you are planning to attend the Children's Family Christmas Eve services, bring some diapers with you. We will be collecting them in honor of baby Jesus and passing them along to our friends at HALOS.

Wish List:

- New Twin Beds, Bunk Beds, Toddler Beds, and Cribs
- Diapers (Newborn through Size 5), Pull-Ups, and Baby Wipes
- New Car Seats and Booster Seats
- Infant and Toddler Toiletries
- Gift Cards to WalMart/Target for emergency needs
- Unrestricted monetary donations

CHARLESTONHALOS.ORG

Phone: (854) 444-3716

Donate Financially

The ongoing ministry and expenses of Holy Cross are provided by the consistent generosity of our people. Consider a special Christmas offering or set up a regularly scheduled gift to support our church. You can learn about all the ways you can give and set up recurring gifts on our website. HOLYCROSS.NET/GIVE

Buy Groceries

Holy Cross partners with East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO) throughout the year to do grocery bag Sundays, but they are always in need of food and clothing donation to feed more than 400 low-income families in our community. This is a very practical and local need you can meet. Go to their website for their current wish list of items and drop-off times throughout the week. ECCOCHARLESTON.ORG

Serve at Church

Giving of your time and talents is an incredible way to be generous. Coming up this month we have several opportunities to serve together. The details are at HOLYCROSS.NET/EVENTS Want to find a spot to serve regularly? You can join a ministry team at Holy Cross. Check out HOLYCROSS.NET/SERVE to learn about our teams.





GATHER WITH US THIS CHRISTMAS!

Sullivan's Island : Decemeber 24:

- 3:00 PM Contemporary Worship in Great Hall
- 4:00 PM Children's Family Service in Traditional Church
- 5:00 PM Contemporary Worship in Great Hall/Parish Hall
- 7:00 PM Traditional Service in Traditional Church
- 11:00 PM Traditional Service in Historic Church

Daniel Island : Decemeber 24:

- 3:00 PM Children's Family Service in Traditional Church
- 4:30 PM Children's Family Service in Traditional Church
- 5:30 PM Contemporary Worship in Parish Hall
- 7:00 PM Blended Blended in Traditional Church

In Person Services on December 25

- 10:00 AM Sullivan's Island in Historic Church
- 10:00 AM Daniel Island in Traditional Church

For more information:
HOLYCROSS.NET/CHRISTMAS

