

The Advent of Our King



The Gathering Church
Advent Devotional

The advent of our King
our prayers must now employ,
and we must hymns of welcome sing
in strains of holy joy.

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“The Advent of Our King” hymn by Charles Coffin (1736),
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Common English Bible (CEB) © 2010.
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“Advent Explained” adapted from *The Worship Sourcebook* published by
the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, MI.

Devotional reflections by Chris Breslin.

Kids’ devotional references (JSB) refer to Sally Lloyd-Jones’
Jesus Storybook Bible.

This is a highly recommended family resource for Advent or anytime of the year.

More devotional materials and free downloads can be found at
www.allgather.org/advent/

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The Gathering Church

Gathered to be present to God in worship, connected to each other
in community, & engaged in loving and serving the world.

We worship at each Sunday at
Creekside Elementary School (Durham, NC) at 10:30am.

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Advent Explained

The great proclamation “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14) assures us that God has entered into human history through the incarnation of the Son. The season of Advent, a season of waiting, is designed to cultivate our awareness of God’s actions—past, present, and future. During Advent, we hear the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming as addressed to us—people who wait for the second coming. In Advent, we heighten our anticipation for the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament promises, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away. In this way, Advent highlights for us the larger story of God’s redemptive plan.

A deliberate tension must be built into our practice of the Advent season. A Christ has come, and yet not all things have reached completion. While we remember Israel’s waiting and hoping and we give thanks for Christ’s birth, we also anticipate his second coming at the end of time. For this reason, Advent began as a penitential season, a time for discipline and intentional repentance in the confident expectation and hope of Christ’s coming again.

The Advent season includes the four Sundays preceding Christmas. Worship on these Sundays is designed to help people experience the tension between celebrating and hoping. An Advent wreath with four candles and a Christ candle are lit each successive Sunday and on Christmas to demonstrate the building anticipation of God’s promises and their fulfillment in the Christ Child.

An Advent Guide

Throughout the ages, Christians have celebrated the period before Christmas as a time of waiting for and anticipating the arrival of Jesus. In some sense, we relearn how to wait every year, on purpose, so that we better understand that our waiting for Jesus's return isn't just a default. We find kinship with some of the characters in the biblical narrative. Whether it is Isaiah, whose declaration is both hopeful and heart-rending, or Simeon, who hopes and hopes and is still surprised when God acts. Maybe Mary's story resonates with us or challenges us. Or perhaps you know a little of what it means to be a blue-collar worker like the shepherds in the field. All of these characters are waiting for their King to show up. All, in some way or another, are surprised by when and how he does.

During the next four weeks, read and meditate on these scripture stories. Immerse yourself in the world in which they take place. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you a more attentive *wait-er* and be prepared for the Holy Spirit to show you what that means.

Families: Include your children in these stories and use the *Jesus Storybook Bible* to spark their imaginations and kindle their hearts for the coming of the "Rescuer."

Instead of having prayers furnished for you, spend some time in prayer this Advent. Take time daily in silence, listening for God to speak. You will be surprised at both how difficult that is to do and how fruitful it can be for your soul.

Blessings on this time of waiting. May your eyes, ears, hands, and hearts be tuned to the King and His coming Kingdom.

Chris Breslin
Associate Pastor
Advent 2012

Daughter of Zion, rise
to meet thy lowly King,
nor let thy faithless heart despise
the peace He comes to bring.

A Great Light, A Coming King

The First Week of Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7

Kids: "Operation No More Tears" (JSB 144)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. You have made the nation great; you have increased its joy. They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest, as those who divide plunder rejoice. As on the day of Midian, you've shattered the yoke that burdened them, the staff on their shoulders, and the rod of their oppressor. Because every boot of the thundering warriors, and every garment rolled in blood will be burned, fuel for the fire.

A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever.

-Isaiah 9:2-7

We have all had the power go out at one time or another. Perhaps there was a hurricane or a snowstorm that overburdened the trees and power lines. Maybe it was an accident by the power company. Imagine living in that state: no lights, no heat. At first it is miserable, but eventually you start to get used to it. Your eyes adjust. You grow accustomed to the chore of lighting and blowing out candles. It's amazing, if you're not careful, how fast darkness can become your new normal.

And then...the lights come back on. Not just the lights you need, but every light in the house. The printer reboots, all the clocks start blinking 12:00, the television you forgot that you were watching starts blaring, and the coffeepot that you forgot was on hisses. Everything comes alive. The light has come!

Now, this is but a small illustration. The Prophet Isaiah describes the atmosphere of darkness into which God's light dawns in the coming of Jesus. The Israelites, God's people, had hoped for and dreamed of a day when "the power would be restored," when the lights would flip back on so that the world could see things as they really are.

God promised a King - a King above and beyond any king they had ever known. This King would actually have the sway to make things right, not with a temporary band-aid, but really, always, and forever. This would be a King who could and would forgive their sins. He would be a King who could and would turn their ashes into a crown and their weeping into dancing (Isaiah 61:3). God's people were to believe that this would all come true even when it looked and felt otherwise.

This King would not be like any other king they had seen. Not just another one of God's men like those in the past: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David... This King was the One and was one with God. This King would be the Messiah, the Christ. When he comes, humankind will gush with titles for him. Effusive names...

They'll call him **Wonderful Counselor** because of how much wisdom he possesses. He was in on the creation of the cosmos, so he knows how things are supposed to be (John 1, Proverbs 3, 8, Colossians 1, 1 Corinthians 1-2, Hebrews 1). Do you seek his counsel?

They'll call him **Mighty God** because he is the gold standard for what power looks like. He would come to show the strength of God through weakness, obedience, and sacrifice (Philippians 2, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Do you bask in his sacrifice for you? Are you honest about your weaknesses? Do you draw your strength from him?

They'll call him **Eternal Father** because he was sent by the Father and would be so in-tune with God as to be nearly indistinguishable from Him (John 10, John 14). Can you drop your guard enough to be that intimate and vulnerable with your Heavenly Father? Are you seeking to be remade into His likeness by His love?

They'll call him **Prince of Peace** because his reign will restore the *shalom*, the wholeness and unity that humanity and all of creation has lost, but groans to have restored. Those who seek peace will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9). Do you find peace in this Prince? Do you offer Christ's peace to the world?

Like Israel, it is easy at times to forget God's promise of light and to get used to the darkness. As we wait for the advent of our King, let us be people walking in the light (1John 2), proclaiming to a world in darkness that the "true light already shines" and that the King will return.

As Judge, on clouds of light,
He soon will come again,
and all His scattered saints unite
with Him in Heaven to reign.

The Dawn from Heaven will Break Upon Us

The Second Week of Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:68-79

Kids: "Heaven Breaks Through" (JSB 200)

"Bless the Lord God of Israel because he has come to help and has delivered his people. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house, just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago. He has brought salvation from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us. He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and remembered his holy covenant, the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor Abraham. He has granted that we would be rescued from the power of our enemies so that we could serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes, for as long as we live.

You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way. You will tell his people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace."

-Luke 1:68-79

God promised something outlandish to Zechariah: that he, an old man with a barren wife, was to have a son. This sort of thing smacks of the kind of ridiculous promise made to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 17). Sarah laughed (hence, *Isaac*, which means “laughter”). Zechariah was dumbstruck, literally struck silent. If last week’s reading was about light showing up in darkness, this week’s is about sound into silence.

It is into this unlikely silence that God speaks. His still, small voice cuts through the nervous chatter and frenetic buzz of our daily lives. It is out of this silence that Zechariah then sings, shouts, proclaims the good news that God is trustworthy. Zechariah announces that God’s Kingdom is coming and the King with it. A Child-King. A Mighty Savior whose hallmarks are salvation, mercy, fulfilled promises, rescue from foes, forgiveness for our sins.

This is the dawn that breaks in upon us. This is the Word of hope spoken into a hopeless world, for those without a voice, to those who are used to saying too much. Listen this week. Like John the Baptist’s father, Zechariah, stop doing or doubting and just listen. Create some space in your life to let God show up and fill. In your relationships, be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). In your prayer, let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Let God have the word in your life today. In silence, make room for God to comfort you or to confront you. Out of silence, follow your Savior on the path of peace, and like Zechariah, proclaim with your tongue and your life that the King is coming.

The Everlasting Son
incarnate deigns to be;
Himself a servant's form puts on
to set His servants free.

They Laid Him in a Manger

The Third Week of Advent

Scripture: Luke 2:1-7
Kids: "He's Here" (JSB 176)

In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

-Luke 2:1-7

Perhaps one of the most ironic things here is that while the “king,” the one making all the rules, is sending people to and fro, counting and accounting for everyone, the King comes forth in obscurity. Jesus was, in a sense, born on the move. His unwed and not well-to-do parents acting as good citizens, made their way to Bethlehem.

While they were out, Jesus came. Mary had her firstborn son. She wrapped him, not in the garments of royalty, but in whatever meager rags she had access to. She laid him, not on a throne or a cushy crib, but in a feeding trough for cattle. It is both comical and unsettling that God might choose foolishness to shame the wise, and weakness to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). What does God’s ability to enact His plan of cosmic-sized redemption through a pint-sized baby say about who and how God is?

And this King came into the world on the move.

This Savior came into a world that would neither recognize nor make room for him. Though God so loved the world He gave His “Only Begotten Son” (John 3:16), almost no one in the world saw that love coming. This Son went on to redeem the world though dying a shameful death, naked and deserted on a criminal’s cross, and even fewer recognized what was happening.

Would you have seen any of this coming? If not (and there’s not too much shame if your answer was ‘no’), what might have to change about the way you see? What is getting in the way of being able to see God moving and being a part of the Holy Spirit’s movement in the world?

All glory to the Son
who comes to set us free,
with Father, Spirit, ever One,
through all eternity.

He is Christ the Lord

The Fourth Week of Advent

Scripture: Luke 2:8-20

Kids: "The Light of the Whole World" (JSB 184)

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child.

Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.

-Luke 2:8-20

Terror.

That's what the shepherds felt when an angel showed up to tell them about the birth of King Jesus. The angel reassured them, "Wait, this is good news, for everybody!"

Savior. Christ. Lord.

These are royal titles. The "**Savior**" that the Jews hoped for and dreamed of would overthrow all of the assumptions of empire. God would in fact become King. "**Christ**" means anointed, the one set apart for the job, the messiah who God would rest His Spirit upon (Luke 3:21-22). "**Lord**" is the one who rules. When you call someone "lord," you defer to their judgment and power. All of these expectations are found wrapped up in a manger. All of the "hopes and fears of all the years" are met in the Christ-child. The Lamb, the Lion, and the Lord are all bound up in that newborn.

So what can the angels do but proclaim "Glory!"? They shout with a choir more expansive than you could ever imagine that God has come and brought peace. The shepherds go to investigate. They piece together what the Lord has revealed and what they've experienced, and they too go on glorifying and praising God for everything they have heard and seen.

What deserves your praise and glory? What has the Lord shown you? Where, in our midst, has God worked in a seemingly small and insignificant way that has been a harbinger of peace, a signpost of the Kingdom?

When do you hear God's voice and experience a sort of terror? When do you hear it as good news?

Are you willing and able, like the shepherds, to be caught off guard in order for Jesus, our King, to show up again in our world?

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