



**GOD
WITH
US**

ADVENT 2018

Redeemer 2018 Advent Guide

Christmas is upon us once again! And I'm sure you have been preparing by breaking out old sweaters, perusing amazon for gifts, drinking cold weather beverages, putting up decorations, and playing Christmas music earlier than you should (sorry, Thanksgiving). It is amazing how many people in America celebrate Christmas because this holiday is all about the virgin birth of Jesus. But not everyone who celebrates is a Christian, and far too often the beauty of Christmas is overshadowed by the materialism, consumerism, and greed that can accompany this holiday. But Christmas is a time for followers of Jesus to be distinct from the culture around us by reflecting on the significance of Christ's birth, and truly preparing to celebrate His Advent.

"Advent" means "coming" or "arrival." The Advent season (the four weeks leading up to Christmas day) is a time for Christ's Church to eagerly wait and anticipate the coming of God's Messiah, and to rejoice and worship Jesus as we remember that He humbly came to this earth as a baby so that He could save His people from their sins. He came as a long-awaited light in the darkness surrounding God's people. The Israelites had been expectantly hoping and waiting for God's Messiah to come to this earth to rescue them and to fully establish God's Kingdom on the earth. They had experienced great suffering through judgment and exile and longed for deliverance. Their prophets had proclaimed the future coming of God's special servant who would save His people, and they waited with eager anticipation.

Advent is a time for Christ's Church today to identify with the hopes and longings of Israel in the time leading up to Christ's birth. This will help prepare our hearts and minds to accurately reflect on the significance of Christ's first Advent, to truly celebrate His birth on Christmas day, and to look forward to His second Advent (Jesus' return) when He will set everything right and fully establish the Kingdom of God.

But we currently live in the "in between time" of Christ's first Advent and His second Advent. We know the hope that we have through faith in Christ, but we still deal with the effects of sin. We know the Light dawned when Christ came, but we still struggle with the powers of darkness that currently operate in the world. The realities of living in between Christ's Advents make it that much more significant that Jesus came as our Immanuel, which means "God is with us." God pursues His people to dwell with them through all of the ups and downs of life. This Advent season Redeemer Church is highlighting this truth about Jesus—that He is always with us.

Redeemer is offering this Advent guide to encourage people to reflect on the significance of Jesus' birth and its continual meaning for us today. This guide will have a brief devotional for each of the four weeks of Advent, some reflection questions, some Scripture passages to read, supplemental readings, and songs to listen to to encourage worship this season. There are many great Advent guides out there and we don't claim this one to be better than those. So, feel free to supplement this guide with other resources. We also hope that this guide can come alongside your normal ways of celebrating Advent with your family and friends. Our one goal is that we can help you to prepare your heart and mind to truly rejoice that Christ has come, and to hopefully and expectantly look forward to the day when Christ will return!

A Word to Redeemer Families

We have created a section below each week's entry to include a Jesus Storybook video to watch together, a short devotional, a song to worship together and an activity to do as a family to help focus your discipleship time on the Savior this season. Our suggestion is that after you've met with the Savior through your individual devotional time first, gather your kids together and enjoy the Family Discipleship sections to invite your whole family on the richness of the season. Advent is a season of anticipation; of waiting for the promises made to be fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. It was a season of waiting for many before His birth, and here we are again, awaiting Jesus' return again. God has been faithful to His word and He will be again. We invite you to build the anticipation of the season through different ways that appeal to your child's senses. Consider setting out decorations slowly--maybe, for example adding lights to the Christmas tree, but waiting a week to add ornaments, then adding the star the next week, then the tree skirt the following week. Keep your kids feeling the intensity of the season building week to week. Whatever you decide to do, we pray your family spends this Advent season thinking about God's promises made into flesh through Jesus and how God made a way through a baby that was born in a simple stable; a baby that God would use to one day save the world!

**To help mark the beginning of your time together as a family each week, there will be prompts at the beginning of each lesson to light a candle representing each week of Advent, leading to all 4 candles being lit at the final week. Please remember to use discretion with your little ones. This is only a suggestion and is not absolutely necessary.

Week 1 December 2-8

Theme: Light in the Darkness

Devotional

Have you ever had a terrible camping experience? One where you just can't seem to get to sleep because it is too cold, or too hot, or you can't get comfortable, or you're a city person and can't handle all of the scary nature noises? If you have, then you know the feeling of laying in your tent in utter darkness, longing for the light of dawn to appear and rescue you.

This is the imagery the prophet Isaiah uses when speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel. He pronounced a message of judgment for their wickedness, but, rather than listen to the word of God spoken through His prophet and repent, God's people pursued answers from mediums and spiritists rather than their Lord. Because of this they would be "thrust into thick darkness" (Is. 8:22). Spiritual darkness would swallow them, and eventually Israel would be conquered by the Assyrians for their unfaithfulness to their covenant with God.

But immediately following this dark prophecy is a promise of light. This light would bring blessing, joy, and peace for Israel, and would be a "light to the nations" (Is. 42:6). This was not an impersonal light, but a person. And this promise would be fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who is "the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12). Just as you probably rejoiced at the light of dawn on your camping trip, those who have placed their faith in Christ rejoice that by receiving the true light they are now children of God (Jn. 1:9-13).

Advent is a time to remember and celebrate that, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn. 1:5). The light dawned at Christ's birth, triumphed over darkness at the cross, and has shone on the darkened hearts and minds of those who have placed their faith in Him. We are now "children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) and need not fear darkness. Darkness still exists in a fallen world, but because of Christ we can have hope in the face of darkness knowing that His light has already proven victorious, and He will return to utterly vanquish the darkness so His children can live in His eternal light.

Reflection Questions

How have you seen the light of Christ illuminate the darkness in your life since placing your faith in Him?

How does the truth and hope of the gospel apply to the present darkness in our world?

How can you rejoice in the light of Christ this Advent season?

Who is someone you know who is still lost in darkness? How can you reach out to them with the true light of Jesus?

Main Text

Isaiah 9:1-7 For to Us a Child Is Born

¹ But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;

those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

³You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For 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.

⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Mid-Week Reading

Matthew 4:13-16

John 1:1-18

Colossians 1:1-14

Supplemental Reading

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/praying-for-fullness-this-christmas/>

Song: Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
set your minds on things eternal,
for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descending
comes our homage to command.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
once upon the earth he stood;
Lord of lords we now perceive him
in his body and his blood
he will give to all the faithful
his own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
stream before him on the way;
as the Light of light descending
from the realms of endless day
that the powers of hell may vanish
as the darkness clears away.

At his feet the six-winged seraphs,
cherubim with sleepless eye,
veil their faces to the Presence
as with ceaseless voice they cry:
"Alleluia, alleluia,
alleluia, Lord most high!"

Family Discipleship

Gather Together

*light the first candle marking the first week of Advent.

Watch this video together as a family: [Jesus Storybook Bible "A New Beginning"](#)

The world was hurting. All the sin that had ruined everything in the garden of Eden was now everywhere. Sin had spread like germs do to each and every person and had poisoned the hearts of every man and woman. No one thought about God and even if they thought about Him, they didn't care about Him. God was so, so sad. He decided to wipe the world clean with rain...lots and lots and lots of rain. More rain than could fill a sink, or a bathtub, or even a swimming pool. More rain than even the oceans could hold.

God saw Noah on the earth and saw that he was faithful and loved Him. He loved Noah too and wanted to help save him and his family so that Noah and his family would begin a new world who loved God. God loves a good rescue plan, and this one was going to be a good one. God whispered to Noah His plan to send rain and asked Noah to be prepared. How? By building the biggest, the huge-est, the enormous-est boat ever--called the ark. Noah trusted God and began to get to work. Of course, the other people saw Noah working and when they found out why, they thought he was nuts! They ignored Noah's warnings and ultimately, ignored God and just went about their business sinning and being super bad.

Noah continued working and finally finished building the ark just as God asked him to and just as God said, the rains came. They fell and fell and continued falling until, just as God said, the whole earth was destroyed, except for those on the ark who chose to believe God and trust His words.

Did all the sin of the world disappear after the flood waters receded? Nope. Is there still hurting, sickness, and death in the world today? Yep. The fact that the flood didn't cleanse the world of sin shows us that sin is a problem in our heart. God provided a different ark to rescue us. This ark isn't made of wood and tar, but of flesh and blood. God's own son--Jesus! Light in a dark world!

Worship Together

Play this song throughout the week this week. While you are making dinner, or decorating your home, or in the car.

[Light of the World by Lauren Daigle](#)

Play Together

(All ages) Light in the Darkness Game (2-3 minutes) Let's play a game to celebrate advent. Advent celebrates the light that came to the darkness. So let's pretend that we're in the dark, (lights turned off), we're scared, and we're anxious for hope. Let's all find a hiding place, and we need to be as quiet as we possibly can. Quick go hide! Now when the lights come on, we need to celebrate that it's GREAT news. So when the lights come on, you need to jump up, bounce up and down, and shout for joy.

Play the over and over and each time celebrate that the light has come. Help connect the game to the lesson by reminding the kids that Jesus is the light and on Christmas we celebrate that the light has come and will come again!

(Ages 5 and up) Glow in the Dark Silly Putty

<http://pagingfunmums.com/2016/02/23/15-amazing-glow-dark-activities-kids/>

Study Together

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/teach-your-children-the-virtue-of-waiting/>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/christmas-at-the-piper-home>

<http://www.gentleleading.com/advent-devo/sacred-service>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/an-advent-prayer-for-our-kids-and-grandkids>

Week 2 December 9-15

Theme: Joy in the Face of Suffering

Devotional

People love the Christmas season for all sorts of reasons: they enjoy the cold weather and snow (if you are blessed enough to live in a place where these are realities), the gifts, the lights and decorations, the love and presence of friends and family, and the excuse to eat whatever they want because, "it's the holidays."

But Christmas is not a joyful experience for all. For many December is a very painful month. The joy of being with family is overshadowed by the grief of a loved one being conspicuously absent. Financial hardships preclude the giving of presents as a possibility. Loneliness weighs heavily on the heart for those who feel like they don't have any meaningful relationships. Sickness stifles the life and laughter that usually characterizes the season. And accompanying these, and other circumstances, may be feelings of guilt that, "I shouldn't feel this way at Christmas." These realities remind us that the results of sin in a fallen world affect all people, and that suffering is no respecter of persons—even at Christmas. But we are reminded in scripture that the reason Jesus came to this earth was because of sin and the suffering that results from it.

God's people were no strangers to suffering. They spent years in slavery in Egypt, they wandered the desert before entering the Promised Land, and after being a strong nation for years, they were conquered and sent into exile. After returning from exile in Babylon they grew weary of being under foreign rule and longed ever more for the Messiah to rescue them and establish God's Kingdom. The book of Lamentations captures well the intense suffering that characterized Israel at times and fueled their longing for the Christ.

And Jesus Himself was no stranger to suffering. He is described as a "man of sorrows" who was "acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3)—Therefore, He can empathize with us in our own suffering (Heb. 4:15). This acquaintance encompassed His persecution and His intense suffering on the cross. And the cross was the whole reason He came to the earth (Jn. 12:27). This was according to God's plan and was the perfect expression of God's love (Jn. 3:16). Christ's suffering has brought everlasting life to those who place their faith in Him, resulting in immense joy for the believer. And Jesus Himself endured the cross "for the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2). So, at the cross we see that evil will not triumph over good. Suffering can be turned to joy.

But in between Christ's Advents we experience along with creation the "groanings" (Rom. 8:18-25) of the effects of sin in a fallen world, which informs our deep desire for Jesus to return and set all things right. Because we know that God's immense love for us sent Jesus to the earth and to the cross, we can trust that His love is also holding us as we endure pain and suffering. And we can trust that God is working all things for His eternal glory and our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28) because we know that Jesus came to destroy sin and the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8). This happened decisively at the cross and will be fully realized when Jesus returns. But until then we trust in our good God who has sent His Son, we rejoice in the eternal life we have in Christ, and we wait patiently for His return. Come soon, Lord Jesus!

Reflection Questions

Where do you see pain and suffering in the world? How does the truth of the gospel speak to that?

How does Jesus' first coming and the promise of His second coming impact your daily life?

How can you hold fast to the hope that is only found in Jesus amidst the ups and downs of life?

Who is someone who may be struggling or suffering this Advent season? How can you share the love and joy of Christ with them?

Main Text

Isaiah 53

- ¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
- ² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
- ³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
- ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
- ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
- ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
- ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.
- ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
- ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Mid-Week Reading

Romans 8:18-30

Supplemental Reading

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/celebrating-christmas-broken-heart/>

Song: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, oh Israel

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer

Our spirits by Thine advent here

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night

And death's dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, oh Israel

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, oh Israel

O come, desire of nations bind

In one the hearts of all mankind

Bid thou our sad divisions cease

And be Thyself our King of Peace

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, oh Israel

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, oh Israel

Family Discipleship

Gather Together

*light the first and second candles marking the second week of Advent.

Watch this video together as a family: [Jesus Storybook Bible "God Makes a Way"](#)

Moses glanced over his shoulder and saw the swarm of God's people following him. An angry Pharaoh and his angry army were hot on their heels. The ground shook with all the activity and all Moses saw before him was water. Lots and lots of water. A huge sea was before them as Moses could hear the horses and the army yelling insults and gaining ground toward Moses and the escaping Israelites. God's people, the Israelites were full of questions: Where do we go now? Why would God bring us here to die? Does God really love us? Was it a mistake to leave? Admittedly, Moses was feeling the fear too, but he knew the answers to all their questions. "Everyone! Listen to me! Your God does love you! He isn't surprised we are stuck here. God is planning to rescue us. Do you know what He wants us to do? Nothing! Just watch and be quiet. Watch and see how God will save you."

The Egyptian army was closing in, the hoofbeats pounding just as the Israelites hearts were pounding. The Israelites were trapped with an angry army that wanted to kill them on one side, and a seemingly endless sea on the other side. Moses took a step into the water, lifted the wooden staff that constantly accompanied him each time he faced Pharaoh, lifted his hands over the sea and before their eyes, the immense sea began to split into two like God was holding back the water as a curtain. The Israelites were absolutely shocked and in awe! It's only when Moses yelled "GO!" that they were shaken into action. The Israelites went. Some ran, some walked gingerly afraid too much noise would cause the water to collapse. No matter how they chose to get to the other side, every single one of the Israelites crossed the sea floor safely. The Egyptians followed once they saw the Israelites safely crossed, but instead of holding the curtain of water for them, God let go of the water and Pharaoh and his army disappeared in the water. The enemies were gone and God's people were saved!

"Watch and see" is how God answered His people in the face of a seemingly impossible situation and unable to save themselves. We, too are in an impossible situation with our sin ruling our hearts. We couldn't save ourselves, but Jesus came into the world and said "watch and see" at the cross. Jesus took all of our punishment that we should have had to pay for our sins. Jesus held back the curtain of God's anger so we could cross safely into God's arms. Sometimes we have a small faith and can wonder if Jesus is too good to be true. Sometimes we can trust Him fully with big faith and just know He is bigger than our brains can understand. Whether we trust Jesus with small faith or big faith, every single one of us who trusts in Him will be saved.

Worship Together

Play this song throughout the week this week. While you are making dinner, or decorating your home, or in the car.

[Hearts Waiting \(Joy to the World\) by Matt Redman](#)

Play Together

(All Ages) <http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/2016/09/trusting-god-amazing-water-glass-trick.html>

(All Ages) <http://www.barefeetonthedashboard.com/2015/02/preschool-water-experiment-teach-moses-red-sea-using-jesus-storybook-bible/>

(Ages 5+) Make some ocean slime and play with legos or other toys to recreate the scene of Moses and the Israelites crossing the red sea.

<https://www.allfreekidscrafts.com/Homemade-Toys/Sparkly-Ocean-Slime-Recipe#X3fqfko8Xlv4iARC.32>

Study Together

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/god-talk-family-life/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/explaining-hard-things-to-our-children/>

Week 3 December 16-22

Theme: Waiting with Hope

Devotional

Waiting at Christmastime is hard for children. In fact, it's nearly impossible. They know they are going to get a bunch of presents on Christmas morning and they can't ever seem to contain their excitement. It is even worse if they truly know that they are going to get something they asked for. When I was a kid I accidentally stumbled upon my mom's Christmas checklist of gifts for me and my brothers and found out that I was going to get that razor scooter I so desperately wanted. With that revelation it seemed like Christmas morning was never going to arrive.

A promise of future events or circumstances should cause us to be patient because we know exactly what is going to happen. But the excitement and anticipation often makes waiting feel longer and harder. This is where God's people were when Jesus was born. They had endured the pain of judgment as they were conquered and exiled for breaking their covenant with God. But they had experienced the joy of a promise fulfilled as God brought them back from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem, and the temple was rebuilt. But the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, had yet to be revealed, and the New Covenant had yet to be established. To make matters worse, prophecy ceased, and Israel didn't hear from God like they used to for 400 years. This made waiting for the Messiah that much harder as they longed for Him to appear and establish God's Kingdom on the earth.

But the King did come, and Israel's hopes were realized. God was faithful to His promise as He always is, and Christ brought forgiveness of sin, redemption, and adoption for those who trust in Him. God's law was written on their hearts and minds, and God professed that He was their God and they were His people (Jer. 31:33). And while this waiting most likely felt far too long and difficult for the Israelites, God sent Christ to the earth when the "fullness of time had come" (Gal. 4:4-5).

We are all familiar with waiting expectantly for something. But sometimes the waiting is too hard, and we may fear that our hopes will not be realized. And while we can hope for good things in this earth (a spouse, a child, the perfect job, etc.), our hopes have only been perfectly realized in Christ who is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13) and the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). We have everything we could ever need in Him (Eph. 1:3) and we can rest in God's goodness and faithfulness. Just as God made good on his promise to send His Messiah at Christ's first Advent, we can wait with confident expectation for Jesus' second Advent when He will come in power and glory to fully establish God's Kingdom on the earth. And as we ask and wait for good things on this earth, we can trust that God will bring them about at the right time, just as He did when He sent Jesus. And if He lovingly chooses to not fulfill that desire, we can rest knowing that God has already responded to our deepest needs with His greatest gift: Christ.

Reflection Questions

Reflect on a time where you had to eagerly wait for something. What was the waiting like? How did it feel when what you had waited for finally came?

What do you think it was like for the Israelites as they had to wait for many years leading up to Jesus' birth?

What are some things or events that you currently hope to see happen? What will be your response if God chooses to bring those things about? What will be your response if He chooses not to?

How can we patiently, yet expectantly, wait for Jesus' return in hope?

Main Text

Luke 2:22-34

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord")²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Mid-Week Reading

Galatians 4:1-7

Psalm 130

Supplemental Reading

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-advent-teaches-us-to-wait-well/>

Song

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

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

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Family Discipleship

Gather Together

*light the first, second, and third candles marking the third week of Advent.

Watch this video together as a family: [Jesus Storybook Bible "Get Ready"](#)

It had been over 400 years since God had spoken to His people.

The last time he spoke was through Malachi where he spoke about the Great Day of the Lord and told his people to get ready, then 400 years of silence. God's people kept their ears open, hoping to hear his voice, but God had zipped His lips and nothing came. "Maybe he got tired of us breaking His rules", they thought. "Maybe he doesn't want to rescue us anymore". Doubts crept in, but the people would fight these doubts by telling each other "God made us big, tough, unbreakable promises! He won't forget them!". During that time of silence the people clung to God's promises because, well, what else could they do. God couldn't break his promises. Does that sound like something he would do?

While God wasn't speaking any words to His people, He hadn't forgotten them. He was still with them. God always remembers and keeps His promises. In the quiet, God was actually preparing the very first Christmas. God revealed long before how He was going to use Abraham to bring His Rescuer into the world. During the silence, God was growing a family--mommies and daddies were having babies and those babies were growing up and becoming mommies and daddies and having babies and so on and so on until a man named Joseph and a woman named Mary were born. During that time of growing His family, God was still as faithful and still as present with His people; and even through this family He used many of them to proclaim with their lives (messy and imperfect lives, I might add) that He was still there and that He was working on that rescue plan He promised.

We still have some promises today from God that He made long ago. After Jesus died and rose from the dead, He came back to tell that He would one day return a second time. We've been waiting so long for this to happen. Sometimes we are tempted to think "Maybe he got tired of us breaking His rules", "Maybe He forgot His promise He made so long ago". When we start to worry and doubts creep in, we can fight these doubts, just like God's people did in that time of silence, and we can remember that God promised a rescuer in the Garden of Eden who would crush the serpent's head, and look at Abraham and remember how God promised His son would come through His family. We can remember Christmas, how Jesus came! With Jesus' birth, God was saying "Yes" to that promise in Eden to crush the head of the serpent and God was saying "Yes" to that promise that a rescuer would come through Abraham's family. Jesus is God's "Yes!" to all His promises. So, get ready! Watch with your eyes, listen with your ears because Jesus is coming back again soon!

Worship Together

Play this song throughout the week this week. While you are making dinner, or decorating your home, or in the car.

[Amaryllis by Christy Nockels](#)

Playing Together

(All Ages) Leave clues for the kids beginning in the morning about an adventure you will be taking that evening. Build the anticipation with clues throughout the day teasing out what is to come. When it is time for the big event (ex. a trip at bedtime in pajamas to get hot chocolate, going to look at Christmas lights, watching a special movie together, etc...) make sure to tie back in to the lesson. Ask the kids if it was hard to wait. Did it help to have the clues along the way? Did you ever doubt the surprise would come?

(All Ages) Bake a treat together ([like this Cranberry-Orange bread](#)) and deliver to your neighbors. Help encourage your neighbors with a note attached that reminds them of the promise Jesus made to come back one day. God will use your encouragement to help fight doubts and fears while we wait for Jesus to return.

(Ages 5+) Purchase a larger puzzle and begin working on it together. Take the time together to complete the puzzle and have conversations about waiting and being patient for something that is difficult to wait for. Make the connection to the lesson, but also just enjoy the time together working on something together.

Study Together

<https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/articles/savor-the-wait>

<https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/articles/substance-over-shadows>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/advent-standing-in-the-middle>

Week 4 December 23-29

Theme: God with Us

Devotional

Do you have someone in your life whose physical presence brings you a level of comfort, security, and confidence that surpasses that of other people? When they are in the same room as you or by your side you feel at peace and more capable of living boldly and truly as yourself because of their love, faithfulness, and support. This could be a parent, spouse, sibling, close friend, etc. Chances are we all have at least one person in our lives who make us feel this way to some degree. And as beautiful as it is to have a person like that be with us, the continual presence of Christ is far better than even the closest friend or most supportive spouse. But it's possible that we just need to pay a little closer to His presence.

In Isaiah 7 we learn of a child who would be a sign to God's people in Judah that He would be faithful to them and powerfully deliver them from the threats of the surrounding nations. This child would be called Immanuel, which means "God is with us." This prophecy was fulfilled in the years following it and Judah was graciously preserved by God's presence. But this prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. We know this from Matthew 1:23 where Matthew ties this powerful prophecy back in Isaiah 7 to the soon-to-be-born Savior, Jesus. The angel tells Joseph to name the son that would be born to the virgin Mary "Jesus" because that name means "Savior." This newborn child was not only the perfect fulfillment of a prophecy that was hundreds of years old, but he would also save people from their sins.

For those of us who have placed faith in Christ and His finished work at the cross we are forgiven of our sins, declared righteous by God, and reconciled to Him. We are His adopted son or daughter. Jesus has promised us that He is with us "always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). And we have the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells us and is constantly with us to remind us of who we are in Christ and the joy of our salvation (Jn. 14:15-31). As children of the Everlasting Father we are never without His power, His presence, or His peace ("his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."—Is. 9:6).

Christmas is a time to truly celebrate the perfect gift of Immanuel, God with us. God has always been pursuing His people to dwell with them. He made a way for us to be in a perfect relationship with Him because of Jesus. And now we can rest daily in His presence, which does not waver whether we are on the mountain top or in the valley. Being found in Christ and having Christ continually with us should elicit great joy and worship. Rejoice this Christmas in the coming of our Savior and His continual presence with us!

Reflection Questions

When was the last time you really felt the presence of God? What was unique about that time in your life?

How often do you feel that you are aware of Christ's presence?

What things in your life may be undermining your sensitivity to Christ's presence?

How do you feel comfort and joy when thinking about Christ's presence?

Who in your life needs to experience the presence of Jesus? How can you reach out to them?

Main Text

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Mid-Week Reading

Luke 1-2:21

Supplemental Reading

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/advent-exists-because-worship-doesnt>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-popular-misconceptions-christmas-story/>

Song: Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!

Christ, by highest heaven adored:
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of the favored one.
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, the incarnate Deity:
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!

Hail! the heaven-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 son of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Family Discipleship

Gather Together

*light all four candles marking the fourth and final week of Advent.

Watch this video together as a family: [Jesus Storybook Bible "He's Here"](#)

Joseph and Mary were walking the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem all the while, Joseph was probably wondering to himself "Why, of all the days, did Caesar pick now to count everyone? Why do we need to be in Bethlehem now? The baby could come any day now?". Surely having to see his wife in pain with every step as they trod the long rough road to Bethlehem was not helpful to calm his worries. Trying to calm himself, Joseph began imagining that if Mary did need to deliver the baby in Bethlehem, they would most assuredly find a special place where they would welcome the baby. "This was God's own son, surely He will provide for all our needs". Well, Joseph was right, God would provide and He did have a special place in mind, but it was a much different place than Joseph had imagined!

A few days later, He was born. A wriggly, wrinkly baby Jesus came into the world. Of all the kings who had lived, He was the greatest. Of all the people who had been born, He was the only perfect One. However, He started His life in the most strange way either you or I could have ever imagined. His birth did not take place in a palace, or even a house, but in an old, stinky barn filled with sheep and cows and chickens. Jesus' newborn body wasn't wrapped in beautiful silks or satins, but in simple strips of cloth swaddled around him. He wasn't laid in a golden crib adorned with gems and jewels befitting of a king, but in a well-worn manger filled with bits of straw and hay leftover from the animals dinner. Jesus left the highest throne in the universe to be born in the lowliest of places.

We often think to get to God we have to be so very good and be perfect at listening and obeying our moms and dads, and follow every rule without ever messing up. But God wanted to show us that it isn't about us climbing our way up to Him through what we do, it was never about us going up to Him. Instead, it has always been about Him coming down to us. The only way we could be with Him forever was for Him to come down and rescue us. We could never keep all the rules, Jesus had to come down and keep them for us.

Just think of all Jesus had to give up for us. Everything in Heaven was so perfect. Jesus sat right next to His Dad on the throne. He had all the honor and riches and majesty that is afforded the King of kings. Coming down meant that He had to give up all of it, for us, just so He could come down and get us. And He did! He came down to be with us because He knew we could never make it up to Him on our own.

Worship Together

Play this song throughout the week this week. While you are making dinner, or decorating your home, or in the car.

[Joy to the World by Shane and Shane](#)

Play Together

(All Ages) Create some simple luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk, or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi about Jesus' birth. Take a brown paper bag and punch out a star shape, fill the bottoms with sand to keep them from blowing over in the wind, and place a battery operated candle in the bottom. There are lots of different options for luminaries, here is another option, <https://todayscreativelife.com/5-minute-diy-christmas-luminaries/>. (Please be careful and mindful of open flames. Never leave an open flame unsupervised.)

(All Ages) Tell the Christmas story over and over again using legos or small toys to play the different parts. Get on the ground and play together, laugh together, and tell the gospel story over and over again.

Study Together

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/looking-back-advent-candles>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/books/good-news-of-great-joy>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/books/the-dawning-of-indestructible-joy>