

ADVENT

5 - WEEK GUIDE
NOV 27 - DEC 31, 2016



2016 Advent Devotional.
New Community Church of Tacoma | ncctacoma.org

Adapted from The Village Church's Advent Series
TheVillageChurch.net

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AN INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. **1 PETER 1:8-13***

The King is coming. Jesus Christ has come and will come again. This is the hope of the Church whom He purchased with His blood. His coming is the eager expectation and desire of His people. It is our joy because He is our treasure and greatest good. This is the theme of "Advent," formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival." It's the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus in humility and the anxious awaiting of His second in glory. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting.

During the season it is easy to get lost in busyness and the consumer-driven "promises" of our culture, focusing on the shadow rather than the substance—Christ. God promised to send the Savior, and He faithfully fulfilled that promise. Amid the fleeting things that fail to save us and fill us, God comes through on His promises.

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

The Advent season officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues until Christmas Eve or Day. There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on tradition and background. Many people use an Advent calendar, typically made up of 24 "windows" containing Scriptures, stories, poems, gifts, or even LEGOs, to count down the days until Christmas. As each window is opened and the final day draws closer, expectation increases. This reminds us of the hopeful yet anxious waiting God's people experienced as they longed for the promised Savior to come.

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

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

God promised a Savior, and He kept that promise perfectly.

USING THE GUIDE

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

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

Even if you know the Advent narrative well, don't rush past what God has for you in this season. For many, this may be the first time to consider all that God is saying through the birth of His Son. For others, it will be an opportunity to rediscover the way God intimately works in the details of life for His glory and the good of man. For all of us, may this season be one marked by hope, expectation, remembrance and worship. The King has come and is coming! There is much to celebrate.

A NOTE FOR FAMILIES

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

To help toward that end, we have provided a family portion each week that will help you create intentional time to talk about Jesus. If you choose to use the Advent wreath, put it in a special, visible place in the house to serve as a reminder of Jesus' coming. There is also a song each week for your family to sing or listen to together. If you don't have these songs on hand, you can find them on YouTube, Spotify or other online services.

We wrote the family portions of the guide with preschool and elementary-aged children in mind. If you have older children, consider having each person work through the "On Your Own" section in place of reading the family commentary, and then come together to talk about what you learned.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Additional Activities for Families During the Advent Season

Appendix B: Recommended Resources

Appendix C: Additional Scriptures for study and reflection

WEEK 1: THE PROMISE OF A SAVIOR

NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 3

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.*

GENESIS 3:15

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.

*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. You 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. For 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. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of 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. **ISAIAH 9:1-7***

Think of a time you felt completely hopeless.

What circumstances led you to feel that way?

How was your hope restored?

WEEK 1 - ON YOUR OWN

Advent in the Beginning

Many of us grew up with the story of Advent beginning in a stable. But, the story begins in a Garden.

When God created the world, all things were just as they should be. Creation functioned in perfect order and moved in seamless harmony. Man walked in unbroken relationship with God, fully known and unafraid. But in an instant, all that changed as Adam and Eve disobeyed God's good instruction. They took of the fruit, ate, and sin entered the world. Fellowship broken. Peace shattered. Creation thrown into chaos. Darkness, depravity, fear, shame and selfishness flooded the human heart, separating man from God. The situation was dire.

But right then, amid the darkness, God spoke a word of hope: a Savior would come, born of a woman, to defeat the enemy and deliver God's people.

Scholars refer to Genesis 3:15 as the “proto euangelion” or the “first gospel.” From the first moment of our need for rescue, God’s promise was there. Before He addressed Adam and Eve, God turned to the serpent and announced that sin would not have the final say and that the schemes of the enemy would not prevail.

Shadows, Hints and Whispers of His Coming

Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to His people about this promise and gave them things to watch for in order to recognize the Savior’s coming. God revealed that the Messiah would be born in the line of David (Isa. 9:6-7), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and in the town of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). He would be a Man of Sorrows—crushed, despised and rejected—justifying many through what He suffered (Isa. 53). The promised Rescuer would be a light overcoming darkness (Isa. 9:2), a Preacher of Good News to the poor (Isa. 61) and One walking in the power of the Spirit (Isa. 42:1). There were hints and shadows of Him everywhere.

God also reminded His people not to lose heart as they waited for the Savior to come. It’s important to remember that God did not fulfill His promise right away. His people waited a long time. They spoke of the promised Rescuer from generation to generation, enduring cycles of war, rebellion, captivity and restoration. They watched and waited—anxiously, expectantly—for God’s faithfulness.

We can all identify with feeling hopeless and helpless, especially when it comes to the weight of sin. Heavy and inescapable, we know its effects with every breath—both our own sin and that of others. Our world is full of evidence that something is wrong and needs to be made right. The reason we celebrate Advent is because the story of the Garden doesn’t end with man’s rebellion.

God makes a promise, and, as we’ll see in the weeks to come, He keeps it perfectly.

Reflection

Consider Israel’s long wait for the Savior to come. How do you think God’s people fought against doubt, discouragement and the temptation to believe God forgot them?

Are you good at waiting? Why or why not? What makes some promises easier to wait on than others?

God often gives us seasons of waiting to sift and strengthen our faith. If you are in a season of waiting, what might the Lord be teaching you?

How strong is your confidence that God keeps His promises? Explain. Then read 2 Corinthians 1:19-20. How does this passage affect your understanding of God’s faithfulness?

Response

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

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

Songs of the Season

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

WEEK 1 - WITH YOUR FAMILY

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (optional)

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

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

ISAIAH 9:6

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no sin, pain, sickness, death or sadness. God created Adam and Eve to live in His perfect world with joy and peace. But Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God. When they sinned, God's perfect world broke.

There was a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. Because God is perfect, He cannot be near sin. So Adam and Eve were separated from God. The punishment for their sin would also be placed on all humans who were born after Adam and Eve.

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

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

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

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

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for promising to send Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Family Activity

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

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

WEEK 2

The Promise Perfectly Kept The Birth of Jesus

DECEMBER 4-10

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

MICAH 5:2

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **LUKE 2:1-7***

Describe a time when you looked forward to an event for a long time.

What emotions did you feel as you waited?

How did you feel when your wait was finally over?

WEEK 2 - ON YOUR OWN

He Came Just as He Said He Would

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the promised Savior, telling the people how to recognize His coming and reminding them that God had not forgotten. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the Son of a virgin, a King to rule according to the lineage of David, ushering in an era of unprecedented peace. Israel watched and waited, filled with longing and expectation for this promised Rescuer.

And then, on a night unassuming and normal, He came—just as He said He would. A young woman named Mary, who was with child, journeyed alongside Joseph, her betrothed, from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted for the census according to Caesar's decree. The couple entered the sleepy Judean town, filled to the brim with the descendants of David, and took refuge in the only place available: a stable. And when the fullness of time had come, Mary gave birth to her firstborn: a Son. He was wrapped in cloths, laid in a manger and given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. And just like that, a whisper in the Bethlehem night, a Child was born, a Son was given.

Four hundred and fifty years of silence had passed since the final words of the prophets. At long last, a cry of deliverance was heard again, uttered from the lips of the Word made flesh. This newborn's cry pierced the midnight sky like a trumpet heralding sin's demise and the defeat of death forever for all who would believe. The Ancient of Days stepped into time and wrapped Himself in the frailty of human skin. He came, full of pity, compassion and power, to rescue those lost in darkness and carry them into the kingdom of everlasting light. He came—just as He said He would, to do what we never could.

God keeps His promises, and He keeps them perfectly. With hindsight, we see in Jesus the fulfillment of all that the prophets spoke concerning the Messiah. We understand that our Lord has done just what He said He would do in exactly the right way, at exactly the right time. May our hearts be encouraged! Surely He who has been perfectly faithful to His promises in the past will be faithful to all His promises to come. Let Advent be a time to reflect on God's faithfulness to do exactly what He has said.

Reflection

Consider the prophecies from Isaiah 9:1-7 and Micah 5:2. How do you see these fulfilled in Jesus' birth?

Think about the circumstances that led Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. What do they show you about God's sovereignty?

What promises has God already fulfilled in your life? How do you keep the memory of His faithfulness fresh?

What promises of God are you waiting to see fulfilled? How does the perfect fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah encourage your confidence in His faithfulness?

The Old Testament contains many prophecies pointing not just to Jesus' birth but also to the salvation He would accomplish. Look up the passages below and see how they illustrate this truth.

OT Prophecy

Genesis 3:15

Isaiah 9:2

Isaiah 53:10-11

Isaiah 53:4

Isaiah 61:1-4

NT Fulfillment

Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 4:4-7; Colossians 2:13-15

Matthew 4:12-17; John 1:4-5, 12:46

Romans 5:1-2

Matthew 8:14-17

Luke 4:16-21

Response

As you make your list of people to buy gifts for, include someone who would never expect to receive a gift from you. Think of the delight you feel in blessing them and consider the love in God's heart as He sent His Son to die for sinners.

In prayer, thank God for the perfect fulfillment of His promise through Jesus. Confess places where your confidence in His faithfulness is weak and ask Him for increased trust, belief and hope.

Songs of the Season

O Holy Night

Silent Night

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

WEEK 2 - WITH YOUR FAMILY

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (optional)

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

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

JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

Do you remember the promise we talked about last week? God's promise to send a Rescuer? His promise to send Jesus? Well, He kept His promise! Jesus came, just like God said He would.

After thousands of years of waiting, on an ordinary night, Jesus came. God gave His people hints and clues about how Jesus would come. He told them that Jesus would come from Bethlehem, be a Ruler and bring peace. Many expected a soldier; some expected a politician. No one expected a baby. But that's how Jesus came.

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

a stable to sleep in. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and Jesus, the Savior, was born.

Jesus, the King of heaven, left His perfect home to be born a baby to a young man and woman. He became fragile and helpless. His room that night was a stable—dirty, smelly and full of noisy animals.

His bed was not kingly and luxurious; it was a feed box that animals ate out of. Mary had to wipe old, rotten food out of the manger and cover it with poky straw before she laid her tiny baby in it.

But everything that happened that night was exactly what God had planned and promised. Jesus came, just like God said He would. God had kept His promise! Jesus had come to save sinners!

The events of that night, in that stable in the little town of Bethlehem, would change the world forever.

Prayer

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

Song

As a family, sing or listen to *Away in a Manger*.

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

Family Activity

This week, keep the promise you made to your family during last week's family Advent time. Talk about how you fulfilled the hints and clues you gave them. Discuss the experience of waiting: What was it like to wonder when and how the promise would be kept? What was it like to finally experience what you had been waiting and hoping for? Remember together God's faithfulness in keeping His promise to send a Savior. It happened just as He said it would.

WEEK 3

Tell of His Coming The Shepherds and Angels

DECEMBER 11-17

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over

to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. **LUKE 2:8-20**

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" **ROMANS 10:14-15**

Who is the first person you tell when you hear or experience something good?

WEEK 3 - ON YOUR OWN **Tell of His Coming**

We love hearing good news, especially when we're the first to know. There's a big difference between getting a phone call from your best friend about their pregnancy, engagement or new job and finding out about it on Facebook. We cherish being invited to participate in the lives of the people we love instead of simply being spectators.

Today the ability to share exciting news with others is quick and easy. With one tweet, post, hashtag or group text, we can communicate with the masses. But things were obviously very different in the time Jesus was born. When something important happened, such as the birth of a child, heralds often spread that news. Families welcoming new babies, if they had the means to do so, would hire someone to go throughout the community and announce their happy news.

Mary and Joseph, of humble means, did not have the ability to do this. But God Himself provided a company of heavenly heralds to proclaim the birth of His one and only Son.

Imagine the scene: shepherds on the midnight watch, ears and eyes open for signs of danger, sheep bleating in the background. And then, out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord, the glory of God and news of a promise perfectly kept. It is amazing that God chose this group of men as the first to hear the Good News. In the time of Jesus' birth, people regarded shepherds as liars and thieves.

Because they were nomadic, moving from place to place to graze their flocks, people didn't readily trust them. Yet it was to men such as this that God announced the Messiah's coming. He told them first! Not royalty, not the religious leaders of the day, but shepherds—lowly and insignificant. He invited them into His story and then mobilized them as the very first evangelists.

As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find Mary, Joseph and the Savior Child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the One through whom salvation would come, they spread the word of all that had taken place.

We are like these men—unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ's birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of His death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into His story, sent out as heralds of both Jesus' first coming

and His second. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this Good News of great joy—with amazement, belief and action.

Reflection

How did you first hear the gospel? Who told you, and how did you respond?

God does not need messengers to communicate His gospel. Why do you think He charged the shepherds with sharing the Good News of Jesus' birth? Why do you think He charges us with sharing the Good News of salvation?

Did sharing the news of Jesus' birth feel like a burden or a joy to the shepherds? Why? How do you feel about sharing the gospel? What might help you consistently view it as a joyful calling?

What fears keep you from sharing the news that Jesus has come to save sinners? Look up Colossians 1:3-6. How might the assurance in this passage increase your boldness?

Response

Write a letter to someone who was instrumental in your coming to faith. Whether or not you can actually send them that letter, communicate how the Lord used them to change your heart and life.

In prayer, praise God for loving the weak, despised and lowly. Thank Him for the person or means He used to share the gospel with you and ask Him for the boldness and faith to do the same.

Songs of the Season

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Angels We Have Heard on High
While Shepherds Kept Their Watch by Night
Come Ye Lofty, Come Ye Lowly

WEEK 3 - WITH YOUR FAMILY

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (optional)

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

*And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **LUKE 2:8-12***

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

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **LUKE 2:15-17**

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

God kept His promise! The most wonderful moment in all of history had just occurred, yet no one knew about it. As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus' birth. And He began with an unusual group of people.

Kings, queens and religious leaders were not the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus.

Instead, God told the most unimportant of people His Good News first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals thieves and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the Rescuer had come. And the way they heard that Good News was nothing short of amazing.

While the shepherds watched their sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel that appeared to them was no baby with wings and a harp sitting on a cloud, like some stories might describe. No, this angel was a warrior of the Lord. And he shined with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of Himself.

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

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

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

Prayer

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

Song

As a family, sing or listen to *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks*.

*While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.
"Fear not," said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind,*

*"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind."
"To you, in David's town this day,
Is born of David's line
The Savior who is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign:
The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,*

*All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid.
Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God and thus
Addressed their joyful song:
"All glory be to God on high
And on the earth be peace,
Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men
Begin and never cease."*

Family Activity

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

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

WEEK 4

The Promise for All Peoples: The Journey of the Magi

DECEMBER 18-24

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

*'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.'"*

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

*After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. **MATTHEW 2:1-12***

What is the farthest you have ever traveled from home?

How did it feel to be outside your normal setting?

What made you uncomfortable? What did you find interesting and new?

How did the experience change the way you understand the world?

WEEK 4 - ON YOUR OWN

The Promise for All Peoples

Magi were men trained in astrology, dream interpretation and other mysteries. They studied the sky and knew the stars and their significance. The Magi mentioned in Matthew 2 lived in the East, probably near Persia. We do not know their exact identity and origin. What we do know is that they were not Jews—they were Gentiles. It is possible that these men heard of the promised Savior from Jews residing in their land during the Babylonian captivity. When they saw the star signifying His birth, they left their home for Jerusalem, embarking on a journey to find the newborn King and worship Him.

At least two things are striking about the events that unfold in Matthew 2. The first is that these men were Gentiles. They were not of Israel, not descendants of Abraham. The birth of the promised Messiah shouldn't matter to them. The second is that God was the One who announced the birth of His Son to the Gentile world. God appointed a star to herald the news of His coming.

God set that star in the sight of these Magi. God used that star to lead them to His Son so they could worship Him as the rightful King.

This scene in the Advent narrative whispers of an incredible mercy—God reveals His Son and extends salvation to the nations. Men and women from every people, tribe and tongue will taste the honey-like sweetness of Jesus' name upon their lips, confessing Him as Lord and worshiping Him as King.

In the same way God set a star in the sky to lead the Magi to Jesus, He places His children in their neighborhoods, workplaces, PTA meetings and lecture halls to do the same. You don't have to go overseas to impact the nations. God brings them to our doorstep—refugees, international students, those in search of greater opportunities and freedom. The nations may very well live next door.

Being part of God's global purposes may be as simple as reaching out to people He has placed in your everyday life. Or it may be that you go to the ends of the earth and happily herald the Good News to those who have never heard it.

The world is big, and the gospel is not an American idea. The gospel has been proclaimed to us too; the mercy of God extended to the Gentiles means that mercy has been extended to us. The story of the Magi stirs our hearts to look beyond our familiar comforts and remember that it is our joyful duty to bring that gospel to all nations. We want to be a part of what God is doing as He continues to draw men, women and children from all nations to come and worship His Son.

Reflection

Look up Psalm 86:9. What promise do you see in this verse? What reassurance does the story of the Magi give us about the spreading of the gospel? How should the story challenge us as those who are called to tell the Good News?

What common reasons do Christians give for not spreading the gospel to all nations? Are any of these reasons valid?

Should we be more concerned about sharing the gospel with those near or those far away?

Look up Ephesians 2:11-17. In this passage, who are "those who were far off"? Are people in foreign countries farther off from the gospel than you were when you first heard it? Explain.

What is the primary means God uses to make disciples of all nations? How can you actively take the gospel to all nations in the upcoming year? List some specific ideas.

Response

Think of someone you know who is actively involved in reaching the nations with the gospel. Take time this week to pray for them by name and write them an encouraging email or letter.

In the next few weeks, notice how many people from other nationalities you see in the rhythm of your everyday life. Ask the Lord to give you faith and favor in building relationships and sharing the gospel.

Songs of the Season

Joy to the World
O Come, All Ye Faithful
Go! Tell it on the Mountain
We Three Kings

WEEK 4 - WITH YOUR FAMILY

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (optional)

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

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

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

MATTHEW 2:11-12

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

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

That same night, God placed a special star in the sky, a bright body of light that announced the birth of the King. Some men in a faraway country saw this star. These men were called Magi. They were educated men who studied the skies and nature. Most scholars believe these men came from Persia, or modern-day Iran. There was something very special about these men.

Throughout the Bible, God promised to send a Rescuer to save the Israelites from their sins. But these Magi were not Israelites. They were Gentiles. That means they were not from Abraham's family and likely did not know and worship God. But that night, God did something that no one expected.

By placing that star in the sky, God showed unbelievable mercy toward all people. In showing the Magi that Jesus, the King of heaven, had been born, God was extending salvation to people of all nations.

When the Magi saw the special star that God had placed in the sky, they left their home country to find Jesus. Their journey took a long time. They did not arrive in Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. In fact, it may have taken them up to two years to reach the place where Jesus was.

The Bible tells us that when the Magi found the place where Jesus was living with Mary and Joseph, they entered the house, bowed down and worshiped this small child who had come to save sinners. They then gave Jesus precious, costly gifts.

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

Prayer

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

Song

As a family, sing or listen to O Come All Ye Faithful.

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

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

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

Family Activity

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

CHRISTMAS EVE

WITH YOUR FAMILY

Set aside 10 minutes to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (optional)

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

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

But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. - LUKE 1:1-20

Song

As a family, sing or listen to Silent Night together.

*Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy infant, so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace
Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!
Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.
Silent night, holy night
Wondrous star lend thy light
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!*

Prayer

Have one person pray, thanking God for His incredible faithfulness in sending Jesus to save His people from their sins.

WEEK 5

The Promise of Jesus' Return

DECEMBER 25-31

*And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. **LUKE 21:27-28***

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. **2 PETER 3:8-14***

Think about the different ways in which you prepare for things in your life—whether it's making dinner, getting ready for work or having a guest over. How much time and intentionality do you invest and why? What motivates you toward careful preparation? What adjustments do you make to your schedule, plans, budget, etc.?

WEEK 5 - ON YOUR OWN

The Promise of Jesus' Return

For many of us, Christmas Day is one of the most important days of the entire year, which is obvious given the intense amount of preparation that often goes into it. We adjust schedules, plans and budgets months in advance. Family members travel in from far away. Decorations are perfectly placed, menus are planned, and gifts are purchased, wrapped and hidden. There is intentionality, joy and anticipation; all because this day is significant. And also because we believe it is a reality.

Christmas isn't a pretend day; it's real. We wouldn't go through all the trouble to prepare if we didn't believe Christmas was, in fact, an actual day. We trust it to come on the same date every year. Out of love and expectation, we make every necessary preparation, so that when it becomes our reality, we are ready.

We spend months preparing to celebrate and remember Christ's first coming. How much more should we seek to be ready for His second coming? That day, too, is a reality; an absolute certainty.

Unlike Christmas Day, which happens every December 25, only the Father knows the day and hour His Son will return. But He is coming. In the fullness of time, He will split the sky and descend to destroy all wickedness, receive the worship that is rightfully His and usher in a new age—the beginning of unbroken, unending fellowship with Him. We should believe in, think about, look to and prepare for that day.

Once More We Wait

The day of Jesus' return is certain and coming, but—so far—it is not today. We find ourselves much like the Israelites long ago—waiting. Which begs the question: How then shall we wait? Peter asks and answers this very question in his second letter. In love, he reminds his readers that, though the days seem long and weary in the waiting, God is not slow in keeping His promise.

He assures them of the absolute reality of the appointed day when Jesus will return. And he then tells them exactly what kinds of lives they are to live in light of this coming day—lives of holiness, godliness and hopeful expectation.

Peter's exhortations are just as much for us today as they were for the believers he wrote to long ago. We too are living in the days of God's patient mercy. We need to be reminded that really believing in and looking toward the reality of Jesus' return changes the way we live. It reorients our hope and perspective. It creates a sense of urgency and sobriety, as well as giddy anticipation—just like a child who cannot wait for Christmas morning.

Let us, the people of God, be found ready in the waiting. As this Advent season comes to a close, take some time to reflect on how the reality of Jesus' return affects the way you live. May your heart be full and your eyes bright as you hope all things in Christ and look to His coming. Take heart, beloved. It won't be long.

Reflection

Reread 2 Peter 3:8-14. What stands out to you in this passage and why? What questions does it leave you with?

How does your life reflect your belief that Jesus will return? Is it something you think about and long for? If not, why do you think that is?

What do you think of when you hear or read the words "be diligent"? What does it look like for you to be diligent in pursuing holiness and godliness? In what areas do you need to fight and flee from sin? In what areas do you need to cultivate love for God and love for others?

Look up Romans 8:22-25. Compare it to Revelation 21:1-7. What future birth do we await? How does looking expectantly to the promised return of Jesus affect the way you see your present circumstances?

Response

One way God's children prepare for Jesus' return is by caring for the poor, vulnerable and outcast (Matt. 25:31-46). As you look ahead to the new year, think of practical ways you and your family or community can care for the weak in your area.

In prayer, thank God for the reality that Jesus will return and make all things new. Confess any areas of your life—finances, time, relationships, stewardship of your body—where you haven't been diligent in pursuing holiness. Ask the Lord to show you specific ways you can actively await His promised return in the coming year.

Songs of the Season

Glorious Day
In Christ Alone
Look and See
You Hold Me Now

WEEK 5 - WITH YOUR FAMILY

Set aside 10 minutes to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (optional)

As a family, light all five candles. Talk about how Jesus, the Light, came into the world to pierce the darkness of sin once, and He will return to do away with it forever.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. **LUKE 21:27-28**

"I am going to show you a secret, John," Jesus said, "about when I come back." "Write down what you see so God's children can read it, and wait with happy excitement. I'm on my way... I'll be there soon."

JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

God kept His promise! Jesus came, just like God said He would. But God's promises don't end there. Just like God's people waited with eager anticipation for Jesus to come and rescue them from their sins, we are waiting too.

God made us another promise. He promised that Jesus would return to earth. He has already saved us from our sins if we love and trust Him. But when He comes the second time, He will save us from all the brokenness that sin has caused in the world.

Just like before, God has given us hints and clues about how and when Jesus will return. And just like before, we wait. Sometimes we wait patiently. Sometimes we wait with tears and frustration because we can't wait to live in a world without any sin. Sometimes we forget and wonder if Jesus really will come back. But God is faithful—even when we are faithless. And Jesus will come back.

This time, Jesus will not come in the middle of the night as a baby. He will not be weak and helpless. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes back, He will ride out of the sky on a horse, carrying a sword. He will do battle with Satan. And He will win. Our Rescuer is coming back!

While we wait, we wait with hope. We live lives of joy, peace and compassion. We strive to be more like Jesus, every day putting sin to death. And we tell others that Jesus came to save sinners in hopes that they will love and trust in Him too.

Jesus is coming back. We don't know when, but we know He's coming. Soon. So be ready. Soon we will worship our king, as He deserves, forever. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer, asking Jesus to come again soon.

Song

As a family, listen to or watch *God With Us* (featuring Isaac Wimberley) by Folk Angel. You can find the video at www.vimeo.com/32459389.

Family Activity

Together, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and talk about what Jesus' return will be like, look like and sound like. What do you learn from this passage?

Ask your children what questions they have about Jesus' return and if it's something that scares them to think about. Assure them that Jesus' return will usher in a world with no more sin, sickness, sadness, fights, punishment or having to eat foods they don't like. Even better, those who love and trust Jesus will be with Him forever with no separation. We should look to and long for Jesus' return. And while we wait, we should take seriously His command to love Him first and most, know His Word, care for the poor and share the gospel.

APPENDICES

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

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

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

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

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

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

Activities to help you create intentional time:

- Make a set of Christmas ornaments to remind you of the prophecies of Jesus' birth and their fulfillments.
- Spend time imagining what the "glory of the Lord" shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props and loud singing.
- Make a Christmas card for someone who does not love and trust Jesus. Wish them a merry Christmas and tell them that Jesus came to save sinners!
- Consider a way your family can serve in the community during the Advent season.

Here are a few ideas:

- Adopting an angel and shopping for them together.
- Visiting an elderly care center and singing carols for the residents.
- Serving a meal at a homeless assistance shelter.
- Taking dinner to someone you know who is lonely or in need.

APPENDIX A: Additional Activities for Families During the Advent Season

- Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus' birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.
- Play hide-and-seek and talk about how Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Thank God for sending Jesus.

Ideas for capturing teachable moments:

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

Ways to recognize and remember milestones:

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

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

APPENDIX B: Recommended Resources

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

Behold the Lamb of God by ANDREW PETERSON

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

FOLK ANGEL

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

Treasuring Christ in our Traditions by NOEL PIPER

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

The Advent Book by JACK AND KATHY STOCKMAN

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

Messiah by GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

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

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas edited by NANCY GUTHRIE

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

Songs for Christmas, Silver and Gold by SUFJAN STEVENS

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

APPENDIX C: Additional Scriptures for Study and Reflection

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

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

ISAIAH 11:1-5

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

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

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **JOHN 1:1-5; 14**

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

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11**

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. **HEBREWS 1:1-4**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." **REVELATION 21:1-5**

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. **REVELATION 22:17**

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!
REVELATION 22: 20

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

	OT Prophecy	NT Fulfillment
The Son of God	Psalms 2:7	Matthew 3:17; Luke 1:32, 35
The seed of woman	Genesis 3:15	Galatians 4:4
The seed of Abraham	Genesis 17:7; 22:18	Matthew 1:1; Galatians 3:16
The tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:33; Revelation 5:5
The seed of David	Psalms 132:11; Isaiah 9:6	Acts 13:23; Romans 1:3
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-6
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:22-23
Called Immanuel	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:2-23
Children of Bethlehem slain	Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18
Being called out of Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:15
Being anointed with the Spirit	Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1	Matthew 3:16; John 3:34
Being a Prophet likened to Moses	Deuteronomy 18:15-18	Acts 3:20-22; John 6:14
A Priest in the order of Melchizedek	Psalms 110:4	Hebrews 5:5-6
Public entry into ministry	Isaiah 61:1-2	Luke 4:16-21, 43
Ministry beginning in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:12-16, 23
Entering publicly into Jerusalem	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-5
A Shepherd for God's people	Ezekiel 34:1-31	John 10:1-18