

# Eternal Church Advent Study Guide

• Personal and Family Study •

1 Peter 1:8–12 (ESV)

*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.*

What are we waiting for...and for whom?

It seems like we have been doing plenty of waiting over the past 2 years. We look around and an overwhelming majority of us find this world less of what we had ever envisioned for it. We know that things are not the way they should be, and we wait with expectation for a new or better day.

This is the theme of "Advent," which is a word derived from the Latin word for "coming" or "arrival." This season is about remembering the past promises of God, the way in which He has fulfilled those promises in His only Son and the hope and expectation for His second advent in glory, when all things sad will come untrue.

## **HISTORY AND TRADITION**

The Advent season lasts for four Sundays. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, or the nearest Sunday to November 30. Advent ends on Christmas Eve and thus is not considered part of the Christmas season. This year Advent will begin on Sunday, November 28 and conclude on Friday, December 24. The Advent celebration is both a commemoration of Christ's first coming and an anticipation of His second coming. As Israel longed for their Messiah to come, so Christians long for their Savior to come again.

There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on tradition and background. Many people use an Advent calendar, typically made up of 24 “windows” containing Scriptures, stories, poems or gifts, to count down the days until Christmas. As each window is opened and the final day draws closer, expectation increases. This reminds us of the hopeful yearning God’s people experienced as they longed for the promised Messiah to come. Another popular tradition is marking the progression of the season through an Advent wreath made up of five candles. 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 the eve of Jesus’ arrival on earth. Regardless of the tradition, Advent can be a significant time in the life of the church.

## **USING THE GUIDE**

This guide contains five weeks of material, with both a study to complete on your own as well as a discipleship plan to assist families in navigating the Christmas season intentionally with spiritual emphasis. The family portions are designed to work for families of all shapes and sizes and do not require burdensome preparation. However, please look ahead at the activity sections to get the most for your family from this resource.

The Advent study walks through the narrative of Jesus’ birth and coincides with the sermon themes each Sunday. It begins in the Garden with God’s promise of a Savior and ends with a mournful and eager anticipation of Jesus’ promised return. In the middle, God reveals His unshaking faithfulness in sending the promised Rescuer to a world He loves dearly.

We will see His love for the outsider as He proclaims the news of His Son first to lowly shepherds. We will be warmed by His missional love which desires all nations to 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 in hidden and mysterious ways 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 again! We still wait, but we are waiting for a reason.

## THE WAITING PLACE

You should find a packet of cards attached to the Advent Guide. We are asking everyone, adults and children alike, to answer a simple question, and write the answer down anonymously on the included card, one card for each willing participant.

The question is: *What is one thing for which you are waiting on God?*

There is no right answer. We know that the answers that our people will submit could be serious and sobering, as well as light-hearted and even funny.

You may want to take time to talk to God about what is bubbling up in your heart.

Please bring that card at some point during the 4 weeks of Advent services at Eternal Church, and clip it onto a board we are calling "The Waiting Place."

This will become a communal place for our covenant family to gather and read responses, laugh, cry and pray over what is revealed in the writing on those cards. Remember to make your "wish" anonymous.

Let's see what God does with our prayers and wishes this Christmas season!

## **A NOTE FOR FAMILIES**

The Advent season will pretty much be as significant as you desire to make it. In the absence of intentionality, the Christmas season will fill family life with a myriad of activities, obligations and secular traditions. Right now, before the calendar begins to overflow, set aside a few minutes to consider what you want this season to be for your family. Make a plan that will include daily activities and weekly gatherings for your children so that your Christmas will not be swallowed up by lesser things.



To encourage you toward that end we have included a family portion in this Advent Guide to help assist your family in your time together. We wrote these portions with preschool and elementary-aged children in mind. If you have older children, consider having each member work through the Personal Study section, instead of reading the Family Discipleship section, and then come together to talk about what you have discovered.

*Please look ahead in each "Family Discipleship Section" to the Family Activities listed. You will want to do this well in advance so you can be prepared with all the needed resources and ideas available to the family each week.*



**PREPARING FOR ADVENT:** Links provided for ideas here:



- **Plan your dates and work your plan. What are the 5 dates on 5 consecutive weeks you can clear for your family discipleship time?**  
(Week 1 = November 28-December 4)  
(Week 5 = December 26-January 1)
- **Make or purchase an Advent Wreath for your family to use in the home every time you come together to share and remember.**  
[Refrigerator version for smaller children](#)  
[Wreath for lighting real candles](#)
- **Make or purchase an Advent Calendar so the children can count down the days.**  
[Calendar Idea](#)
- **Purchase an interactive [Jacquie Lawson 2021 Advent Calendar](#) for your computer.** Although this Advent Calendar does not follow the Biblical story, it is a fun and beautiful way to engage the family on a day-to-day basis
- **Purchase a manger scene that can be handled and played with by children.**  
[Children's Manger scene idea](#)



All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page::

# Advent Week 1

## *The Problem and the Promise*

# WEEK 1

## Personal Study

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

*"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 6:5–6 (ESV)

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.*

Isaiah 9:1–7 (ESV)

*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.*

## ***Focus***

Have you ever needed to be rescued? Have you ever considered the depths of your sin? If there were a videotape of all of your hidden thoughts, desires and actions would you feel comfortable playing it for others?

### ***Advent Beginnings***

Many of us think of Christmas beginning in a stable with a baby. But the story actually begins in a Garden, and spreads thoroughly to the earliest days of humanity.

When God created the world, everything was ordered in perfection. Because everyone and everything submitted to original design there was no need but one, for God Himself. There was no fear or confusion, competing desires, sorrow, sadness, relational distance or death. But all of the goodness was tied to obedience. They were commanded to not do one thing...eat from the fruit of that one tree.

### ***The Problem***

In one instance, everything good became violated and spoiled when they disobeyed and ate in search of a greater goodness. They wanted to be autonomous gods themselves.

Peace shattered. Desires twisted. Creation thrown into chaos. The perfect order thrown into disarray. Perfection defiled by a selfish reach for ultimate independence.

The only thing that could have separated humanity from God, happened: We chose a different god...ourselves. And the punishment was death. And death would have been a mercy, for who would want to live in such a world anyway?

But into the darkness God spoke again. He would not leave us alone. He would rescue us from darkness and remake creation.  
But when?



## ***The Promise***

The Promise was spoken so that all could hear. Throughout the Old Testament, for centuries, God spoke of it again and again over his covenant people. He gave them signs to look for so they could wait with anticipation. He would be born of a woman (Gen. 3:15), from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), in the kingly line of David (Isa. 9:6,7). He would come from the town of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) and grow to be a man of sorrows, despised and rejected, and justify many through his suffering (Isa. 53). The chances of one person fulfilling just 8 Old Testament prophecies would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000, which is essentially statistically impossible. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled over 320 OT Prophecies!

God didn't just tell His people to wait. He gave them words, signs and visions to wait in faith for the promise to be delivered. God was not going to do this Rescue right away. Many people would have to live and die waiting. God asked His people to covenant together around the Promise, to speak of it from one generation to the next while enduring cycles of war, rebellion and captivity. The Promise became the glue that held a suffering people together in purpose.

We can all identify with feelings of hopelessness and the lamenting desires for quick resolution. In our world today we are told many times a day of the things that are not right, and reminded that we can fix them if we act quickly and decisively. Often our answers do the opposite of what we had hoped. We burden others, judge unrighteously, create division and sever relationships.

We act because we love, but we can't fix the real problem that causes all the problems.

*We are the problem.* It is only "out there" because it is "in here." Heavy and inescapable, the weight of our sin entangled with our desires and motivations leave all answers and systems twisted with our angry, selfish and rebellious hearts. The reason we can begin to focus our celebration in Advent is because our story doesn't end in the Garden. Our story, and all of creation's story, will end in His redemption.

## **Reflection**

Consider how the people of Israel were delivered from captivity in Egypt (Ex. 7-14). Can you think of any other way a weaponless, poor servant class of herders and farmers could have won their freedom from the greatest power on earth that was benefiting from their subjugation?

How is sin an even greater master for all born of a woman from the seed of man? What is our only hope to be delivered from such a powerful master?

Think about all the generations of enslaved people who died in Egypt before being delivered. How do you think they survived in the face of such a harsh and hopeless situation? How did they encourage themselves? How were they tempted to give in and release their hope for a better day?

Only God knows the reasons He allows or causes suffering in our lives. He is always doing something beyond our comprehension. In what ways are we being faithful to our hope, and in what ways are we giving in to temptation while forgetting our hope?

## **Closing Response**

What is one hope you have for your family and community as you begin this Advent season? Don't have one? Dig deeper and think of one.

Now pray for your own heart. Repent of the ways you have transferred your hope to quicker solutions, or have lost hope in God's Promise to make all things new.



### ***Songs for Advent Week 1***

- [O Come, O Come Emmanuel](#)
- [Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page.*

# WEEK 1

## *Family Discipleship Time*

*Set aside 30 minutes one night this week to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. If you have an Advent Candle, please designate someone to light the 1st candle before beginning.*

### **Scripture Reading** (Have someone read out loud)

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

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)  
*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.*

### **Focus**

Briefly talk about the feeling of needing to be rescued. When might one need to be saved? This is a great time to speak of silent fears. Who would we call in an emergency? Who are the people who show up to save other people? What are they like?

### ***Story Telling (Read the commentary below to your family)***

In the very beginning there was God, and He created a perfect world for his favorite creation: humans. We were made in the image of God and were asked to rule over the earth with great love and creativity, and with purpose. Adam and Eve decided that they could do a better job without God, and disobeyed His only command. When they did the entire world became less beautiful and poisoned with selfishness and distrust.

The punishment for Adam and Eve was that they had to be separated from God because He could not be in the presence of rebellion, so He cast them out instead of ravishing them. He was also protecting them from a life of eternal separation by minimizing their years on earth. This punishment has been placed on all humans, born on this earth.

**Ask:** Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever created something beautiful that took all your time, love and effort, and someone just destroyed it for no good reason? How did that make you feel?

For God so loved His creation that He had already planned to rescue the creation from this rebellion. But that rescue didn't come right away. God did little things along the way to remind people that He loved them, but He didn't send the Rescuer for thousands and thousands of years. No one knew when the Rescuer would come, and so they had to keep waiting and hoping and praying. The verse that we read from Isaiah was an example of what God told His people why they were in horrible situations. He kept saying, "Someday, all will be made right again."

God knows how hard it is for His humans to wait. The Bible even says that all creation waits with longing...even fish and animals and mountains wait for Him.

**Ask:** What is something you have had to wait for? Why is it so hard to wait? What does it feel like when you have to wait for something you really, really need?

Sometimes God's people waited faithfully and patiently. Sometimes they waited with tears and frustration. Sometimes they doubted that God even remembered His promise, and simply stopped waiting, and decided to do whatever they wanted to do.

But God kept whispering that one day, when they least expected it, He would send The Hero who would destroy the power of sin in their lives and heal the world from its effects.

**Ask:** How do you feel when you are told, "No," or "Not yet?" Do you wonder if you are being loved or listened to; or do you trust that you are being loved, and you just can't understand right now?

Advent is all about waiting without understanding. We know that God sent His Son to rescue us, but millions of people lived and died without knowing that. Advent reminds us that we can trust God to be God, and to be good, even when we don't understand His timing.

***Listen to a Song together:***



[Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

***Prayer***

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page.*

## **Family Activities**

### **(Short-term Hope)**

Parents, right now discuss with your children ideas for a fun activity you can do this week!

- make Christmas cookies together
- walk the streets of downtown Rock Hill or Fort Mill
- choose a favorite Christmas movie to watch
- pull out all the Christmas decorations

Make sure they have something soon to look forward to!

### **(Long-term Hope)**

Parents, tell your children that you have also chosen to prepare a celebration with them at some event in the future. Keep giving hints daily or weekly that you are so excited about this event, but they can't know any details, time or date. Let this longer expectation remind them of how God's people must have felt waiting on the Messiah to come.



#### **Some Ideas:**

- [McAdenville Christmas Town Lights](#)
- [The Nutcracker Charlotte](#)
- [The Polar Express Train Ride](#)
- [Magic of Christmas](#)
- [Christmas Lights at Daniel Stowe](#)
- [Christmas at the Billy Graham Library](#)
- [Carowinds Winterfest](#)



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page.*



# Advent Week 2

## *The Arrival*

# WEEK 2

## *Personal Study*

Micah 5:2 (ESV)

*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*

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive  
and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

Luke 2:1–7 (ESV)

*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.*

### ***Focus***

Can you think of a time when you had looked forward to an event for a long time? What emotions did you experience while waiting? How did you feel when the wait was finally over?

### ***God Keeps His Promise***

God had promised a Deliverer for Adam and Eve thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of years before. All through the Old Testament God kept reminding His people that they had not been forgotten. The rest of the world had moved on. But God's people knew from history, stories, prophets and visions that the world could not only be better...but be made right again. A King was coming. God had promised. And so they waited. They lived and worked, hoped and prayed...and died for generations.

And then, on one unassuming night God came. A young, poor woman named Mary traveled with her betrothed Joseph, from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted for the census according to Caesar's decree. The town was bristling with visitors who had arrived earlier and so they found a place to stay that would have normally housed animals. Mary, full with pregnancy, gave birth in that humble room, to a little baby Boy in the fullness of time. A virgin. An infant. In Bethlehem. God had kept His promise.

Four hundred and fifty years of silence had passed since the last prophet of God had filled the night with words of hope. At last, the whisper of God had turned into a newborn's cry that pierced the bustle of a noisy town, as God broke through the womb of earth with a promise kept. The Ancient of Days had stepped into a realm held together by time and wrapped Himself in the weakness of human flesh. The star over Bethlehem gave notice to the One who gifted it with light. God had come.

In hindsight, we see that God had come at just the right time to fulfill all of the promises, signs and visions of the Old Testament. He was not late.

May our hearts be encouraged in times of darkness and doubt with the Truth that God kept every promise He made to His people through Jesus Christ. Let this Advent be a time to allow His past faithfulness to speak to our unknown present and murky future.

### ***Reflection***

Think about all the circumstances culturally that took place outside of Joseph and Mary's control to bring them into Bethlehem to give birth. How does this speak to you of God's sovereignty and the truth of the scriptures?

Take time to review some of the scriptures below from prophecy to fulfillment. What attributes of God do you see in the birth of His Son?

### ***Promise to Fulfillment***

#### OT Promise

Genesis 3:15  
Micah 5:2  
Isaiah 9:7  
Isaiah 7:14  
Genesis 49:10  
Genesis 12:3

#### NT Fulfillment

Matthew 1:20, Galatians 4:4  
Matthew 2:1  
Luke 1:32,33  
Matthew 1:22,23  
Luke 3:33  
Matthew 1:1

## ***Closing Response***

What promises have you failed to keep? God is a promise keeper and he expects His children to keep their promises. How can you “go back” and seek forgiveness this Advent from the people that have been hurt by unkept promises?

Finally, thank God that He has come to do something that we couldn't do. Even if others choose not to forgive us, He made a way for us to be reconciled and whole again. You are weak, but He is strong. As you listen to the songs below, let them remind you that when God came, His Promise kept was to heal all of the promises not kept by everyone who has ever lived. Is it possible to let that come into your heart?



### ***Songs for Advent Week 2***

- [O Holy Night](#)
- [Silent Night](#)
- [God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen](#)



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page.*

# WEEK 2

## *Family Discipleship Time*

***Set aside 30 minutes one night this week to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. If you have an Advent Candle, please designate someone to light the 1st and 2nd candles before beginning.***

### ***Scripture Reading***

**(Have a family member read out loud and let young children play with a manger scene during the reading and discussion)**

Luke 2:3–7 (The Message)

Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel.

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

**THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**



## ***Focus***

What do you remember about last week when we talked about God's Promise to send a Hero to rescue His people? How do you think you would feel if you really, really needed a hero to rescue you and that person showed up to save the day?

### ***Story Telling (Read the commentary below)***

After thousands of years waiting, on a night just like any other night, Jesus arrived on earth. God had been giving clues and hints to His people for a very long time. He said that the Rescuer would come from Bethlehem, rule over His people and bring peace. Some expected a King. Some expected a politician. Some thought He would be a soldier. But no one expected a baby.

**Ask:** If God had told you that a Rescuer would come to save you what would you expect that person to be like?

Joseph and Mary didn't want to go to Bethlehem, but they had to go. Their king told them that everyone had to go back to their hometown to be counted in a census. Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, so they had to travel a grueling trip of 90 miles to get there. It may have taken them 10 days to travel that far on horseback, and when they got there, Mary was ready to give birth. The town was already full of visitors and they could find no nice place to stay, so they stayed in a section of a home made for animals. That is where the Son of God was born.

**Ask:** How do you think Joseph and Mary must have felt on the journey, and arriving into town late at night with no place to stay? Do you think God knew it would be like that? If so, why might He have done this?

Jesus came from heaven where He was King over the world with His Father. He created all the world with his Father. But now He arrived on earth as a little, helpless baby, in a stinky room with dirty, smelly animals. He wasn't placed in a royal bed. Jesus was put into a container from which the animals ate their food.

**Ask:** How would you expect a King to be born? Where or how would you have wanted Jesus to be born? Why do you think God wanted it this way?

The truth is that none of this was an accident. Everything happened just as God had planned it for His Son to arrive on earth. God must have been showing us something about Himself in the way He delivered the Rescuer to all of us who needed to be rescued. His Son would not come as a king, or a politician, or a soldier. He would come like the weakest and poorest person on earth would come. He would come even as an animal would come.

***Poem before Family Prayer:***

Mary and Joseph were tired and sore;  
They had travelled all day and could travel no more!  
They finally arrived in Bethlehem town  
Only to find there was nowhere to lie down.

The hotels were all full, there were no more beds  
For Joseph or Mary to lay down their heads.  
Exhausted from walking, and ready for sleep,  
They would even be willing to sleep with the sheep.

They asked a kind man if they could sleep in his hay  
In the barn with the animals, where the cows lay.  
The man showed them a spot and moved the cows over,  
For a pillow he gave them a pile of clover.

And Mary and Joseph sat down with a sigh.  
It wasn't the best, but it was warm and dry.  
And they slept, for a while, under stars and the moon  
Perhaps unaware, that Christ's birth would be soon.

While the whole town was sleeping, with stars shining bright,  
Mary's baby was born on that first Christmas night.  
Born in a barn! With the horses and hay!

If you were a king, would you come that way?  
The King of Creation had come to the earth  
And a Bethlehem barn was the place of his birth?!  
I think I'd choose a palace, but God's ways are stranger.  
And God's Son was born and laid down in a manger.  
(Author Unknown)

### **Song**

Sing this song together as a family:



[Away in a Manger](#)

### **Prayer**

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.

## **Family Activities**

**Discuss:** Talk about the family activity that you promised to do as a family this week. Did it happen? What was the best part of it? Ask your children about the experience of waiting for something fun - what were their thoughts and feelings? Give them more hints and clues about the fun adventure you have prepared for the future. Remind them that parents sometimes fail even when we try to keep our promises, but God never fails. He will always keep His promises.



**Make:** Create ornaments that have the Old Testament prophecies, and the New Testament fulfillments on each side. You can find these in the Week 2 "Personal Study" section. Get creative! ([Idea: wooden ornaments](#)) You may also choose to [print and decorate premade ornaments](#). Hang these ornaments on your Christmas tree or collect some branches from the yard and place them in a vase and hang the ornaments on the branches. Place in a prominent place to encourage further discussion!



*\*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*

**Friendly Contest:** Have a contest or collaborate to make the most creative manger scene.

- Legos
- Magna Tiles
- Blocks
- Empty Boxes
- Edible items (think gingerbread, graham crackers, etc)

If you can't build a nativity in some way, then have a coloring "contest."

# Advent Week 3

## *The Announcement*

# WEEK 3

## *Personal Study*

Luke 2:8–20 (ESV)

*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.*

Romans 10:14–15 (ESV)

*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!"*



## ***Focus***

What is being signaled about the purpose of God's rescue mission in this announcement? Who is the first person you would contact if you experienced something really good?

### ***Spread the Good News***

We love hearing good news, and we love telling good news. With just a few taps on our computer or phone, we can spread the good news out into the world. We tweet, we hashtag, we group text, we post on Facebook. For those closest to us we may give them a call, because we are so excited to hear their reaction.

Joseph and Mary had no means to communicate this good news. In their day when something important happened, like the birth of a royal child, heralds were sent out to spread the news to the mass population. If you were an important family in a village, you could even hire someone to go and tell people about the birth of your child. But Joseph and Mary were among the poorest people on earth. Their child was born in an animal stall, and wrapped with dirty pieces of cloth. But God Himself took care of the announcement strategy by sending out legions of heavenly angels to proclaim the birth of His Son. This was not Joseph and Mary's baby, this was God's Son.

But now imagine this scene in heaven. God tells His angels that He was sending His Son...The Wisdom of God, The Word of God, to earth in the form of a baby. He would need them to go and announce this birth to the humans who exist on that little green and blue ball. What a fun charge for an angel! The greatest treasure and the greatest news the earth has ever known, and the angels get to share the news.

I wonder how the angels must have felt as they followed God's direction, and burst through the prism separating heaven and earth, to a place where they find a few shepherds tending their flocks late at night. In Jesus' day shepherds were regarded as liars and thieves. They moved around late at night and never settled down into a community of accountability.

Why would God send a MULTITUDE of heavenly angels to announce the birth to a few insignificant humans with no earthly influence, power or prestige? Where were all the earthly kings, religious leaders, politicians and military figures to hear this announcement?

The shepherds were immediately compelled with passion for action. They did something no shepherd would do; they left their flocks. They found Joseph and Mary, and the new baby King in Bethlehem. And then they traveled through the countryside telling everyone else of the birth of this new Rescuer, even though few would have believed their story.

### ***Reflection***

How did you first hear the Gospel? Who told you, and to what degree did the credibility of the news depend on the character of the communicator?

Do you think sharing the good news of Jesus' birth would have felt more like a burden, duty or an embarrassment...or like a spontaneous reaction to joy and amazement?

Today in our culture, for the first time in our history, more Christians than not think that it is wrong to share our faith with others. Why do you think that is?

What do you think God was sharing about Himself when He sent a multitude of heavenly angels to sing over a few meaningless shepherds?

### ***Closing Response***

Write a real letter to someone in your life who has been instrumental in bringing the Gospel consistently in your life. Put that letter in the mail and send it to them.

In prayer, ask God to forgive your half-hearted response to the best news the earth has ever known. Ask Him to fill your heart with joy for the news that rescues us through any and every situation.



### ***Songs for Advent Week 3***

- [Hark! The Herald Angels Sing](#)
- [Angels We Have Heard on High](#)
- [Joy to The World!](#)



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page.*

# WEEK 3

## *Family Discipleship Time*

**Set aside 30 minutes one night this week to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. If you have Advent Candles, please designate someone to light the 1st, 2nd and 3rd candles before beginning.**

### ***Scripture Reading***

**(Have a family member read out loud, consider providing a candy cane for each child to enjoy during this devotion, and point out that it looks like a shepherd's staff)**

Luke 2:8–12 (ESV)

*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."*

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

### **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

Luke 2:15–17 (ESV)

*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.*

## Focus

If you had the best news in the world to share, how would you get the word out? Who would you tell first, and why?

### **Story Telling (Read the commentary below)**

As Joseph and Mary held their little baby on that long, anxious night in Bethlehem, God began to spread the wonderful news of His birth. He announced the birth of Jesus to an interesting group of people.

**Ask:** *How did God announce the birth? If you had been God, to whom would you have announced the coming of the Great Rescuer?*

The people with the most power and influence in Jesus' day would have been kings, politicians, religious and military leaders. What you may not know is that shepherds were not only unimportant, many people looked down upon them because they didn't have "real" jobs or live in "real" homes. Many of them were just young people, pre-teens and teens. And God chose to tell some shepherds about the greatest news that had ever come to earth!

**Ask:** *Why do you think God chose to tell shepherds, and didn't tell the ones they would have thought of as really "important" people?*

While the shepherds were taking care of their sheep at night the sky above them filled with angelic beings! The Bible tells us that the shepherds were very afraid. Angels look much like you and I do, but bigger and stronger. They would have looked like huge warriors shining from the expanse above. The angels simply appeared as if they had been there all along but couldn't be seen until they wanted to be seen. Isn't that amazing! It's as if God peeled back an invisible cover so the shepherds could see the multitude of angels.

**Ask:** *Why do you think the shepherds were so afraid of all these angels? How do you think you would have felt to see the angels?*

The angel who shared the good news had to calm the shepherds and tell them not to be afraid. He did not come to harm them, but to give them great news. God's glory had been revealed through a baby who had come to earth. The Rescuer had come to deliver everyone from a world of conflict to a place of peace. The shepherds were so excited, they left their animals and quickly went to Bethlehem to find the baby who would become their King.

**Ask:** *What do you think that word "peace" means? Why do you think the shepherds were so excited?*

### **Poem to Read**

Outside of the town, 'round a fire so bright  
Some shepherds were watching their sheep in the night.  
The night had been quiet and silent and still.  
The sheep had been starting to doze off until

When all of a sudden a radiant light  
Surprised all the shepherds and gave them a fright!  
An angel appeared and said not to fear  
For the Savior was born – The Messiah was here!

He'd be wrapped up in cloth and placed in a manger.  
Go see for yourself – He's a total game changer!  
He brings joy to the world. He's good news for men.  
The angel said this to the shepherds and then...

A thousand more angels appeared in the sky!  
They sang praises to God in the heavens so high!  
What a huge celebration of joy to the earth  
As the shepherds were told of their dear Savior's birth.

When the angels had left them alone with their sheep  
There was no way those shepherds would fall back asleep!

"Let's go to the town," the shepherds all said,  
"And see if a manger is really the bed

Of this new little king who was born here tonight."  
So the shepherds all ran to the town with delight.  
They arrived in the village and looked all around –  
It didn't take long 'till the baby was found.

It was just as the angel had told them before,  
They found Mary & Joseph and Jesus – what's more...  
Jesus lay in a manger – The story was true!  
The Savior had come – so what did they do?

Those shepherds went out and they told the whole town.  
They told them how God, as a baby, came down  
Was born in that barn – and yet was the King  
The Savior from Heaven as the angels did sing.  
(Author Unknown)



### Song

Sing this song together as a family  
[Hark! The Herald Angels Sing](#)

### Prayer

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page.*

## ***Family Activities***

**Make:** Draw or paint what you think a night sky might have looked like when the angels appeared to the shepherds.

- Black paper with Q-tip & white paint or chalk
- Watercolor
- Oil pastels on dark paper

Put them on the refrigerator or a prominent place in the home.

**Drama:** Spend time imagining what it must have been like for the shepherds to have a multitude of angels shining down at them from the night sky. Turn off all the lights and have all the family members shine flashlights at one member of the family. Take turns playing the shepherd role.

**Action:** Discuss a way each family member could share the good news of Jesus coming as our Rescuer over the next week of Advent. There are so many more ways to do that today!

- Go caroling as a family
- Write a note to someone and give it to them
- Wear a sticker or put a pin on your backpack
- Invite someone to the Christmas Eve service
- Choose a verse, as a family, to add to your Christmas card you mail out
- Create sidewalk chalk art or messages around your neighborhood

We have the best news the world has ever known, and some people don't even know about it.



**Advent Week 4**  
*A Gift For All*



# WEEK 4

## *Personal Study*

Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)

*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.*

Isaiah 42:1-4 (NIV)

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.*

*He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.*

*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*

*In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope."*

## Focus

Have you ever traveled to a foreign country? How did it feel to be somewhere so unfamiliar? What did you learn about others or yourself in that experience?

### A Gift For All

"The Magi" were people trained in astrology, dream interpretation and other mysteries. TIME described the centuries of efforts to make sense of these traveling Eastern Priests/Wise Men in the December 13, 2004 cover story, "Secrets of the Nativity":

*"Well, from where exactly in the Orient (which means simply "East") were they, anyway? Matthew's word Magi is a vague clue, since it can mean astronomers, wise men or magicians and was applied to people from all over. The gifts they bore—gold, frankincense and myrrh—hint at Arabia, since unrelated Bible stories describe camel trains of similar tribute emanating from Sheba and Midian, both on that peninsula. Their interest in stars suggests Babylon, famous for its astrologers. The happiest guess of all turned out to be the one made in the 4th century by the decorators of the Church of the Nativity in Palestine, whose golden entry mosaic featured the Magi dressed as Persians, also renowned stargazers. When actual Persians came marauding in 614, it was the only place of worship they didn't torch."*

Two things immediately become strikingly clear as this event unfolds in Matthew 2. The first is that these men were Gentiles. They were "outside" of the Nation of Israel and did not share in the lineage of Abraham. Why should they even care that a King of the Jews was coming into the world? The second is how God made sure that He was communicating this birth to a larger audience than just the Israelite people. And He was doing it in a way that was available to those trained in these disciplines. Their orientation was much more in what we might today identify with "science."

Looking to a star is very much in keeping with the religious tradition of this place in time of looking to the heavens, the stars, and the planets for information about the gods' wishes and doings, and some stars or planets were identified with the God above all gods.

This entire scene whispers of God's amazing mercy and plan to reach all the nations with news of a coming salvation. People from every tribe and every language and every nation could look up to the skies to access the Good News.

God has always made a way for everyone to find Him so that all are without excuse. God was declaring to the world through his planets and stars that this King would not just be the King of Israel, but the King over all creation.

In the same way God declared His salvation in the skies, He has placed all of His people as living stars in places of darkness. In our neighborhoods and workplaces, in colleges and lecture halls, in factories and courtrooms. You do not have to travel overseas to proclaim the Glory of God through His plan of salvation. God brings them into our midst physically, through our systems and programs, clubs and shared friendships. And they are only a click away through the magic of cyberspace. God found willing stars and planets to align themselves for His Son. How can we align ourselves to shine this news into the world that we know?

## Reflection

**Read Psalm 19:1-4.** Is it possible that God is speaking of something more concrete here than we realized before. Why do you think the ancients spent so much time studying the movement of stars and planets?

**Read Ephesians 2:11-18.** Jesus came for those close, and for those far away. Who is a person who is "far away" today? Can a "far away" person live or work right next to you?

Why are most Christians hesitant today to share the Gospel with people who live or work near them? Why do most people think it is unkind to do so?

How good would the news have to be for you to want to share it with everyone else in your life? Imagine what that news would be that would break down your barriers for polite social engagement. Why isn't the **only way of salvation** great enough news to do that for you?

## Closing Response

Think of someone in your life at home, at work or at play that is far away from the Gospel. Can you commit one week to praying for them by name to God? What is your next step? If you are uncomfortable talking right now, can you write them a note? Is there a different way you can encourage them in order to draw them closer to the Good News?

If you knew you were going to die this week, what would you want people to know? What would you tell them? And then, whatever that news is, tell them this week. Don't wait anymore.



### Songs for Advent Week 4

- [Joy To The World](#)
- [O Come, All Ye Faithful](#)
- [Go! Tell It On The Mountain](#)
- [The Best Christmas Song I've Ever Heard](#)



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*

# WEEK 4

## *Family Discipleship Time*

**Set aside 30 minutes one night this week to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. If you have Advent Candles, please designate someone to light the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th candles before beginning.**

### ***Scripture Reading***

(Have a family member read out loud and let young children play with a manger scene during the reading and discussion.)

Matthew 2:1–2 (NLT)

*Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”*

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

Matthew 2:9–11 (NLT)

*After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

## Focus

The Bible never says that there were only 3 Wise Men. How many do you think came from the East to meet Jesus? What do you think they thought of a baby?

### **Story Telling (Read the commentary below)**

God made a spectacular show when He announced His son's birth to the shepherds through angelic messengers. But He was also lining up the planets and stars to declare the birth of the Rescuer. God placed a special star in the sky at just the right place for some to see if they knew what to look for. This was a sneaky way to announce a royal birth to those who were looking in the skies for signs from the God who created the heavenly realm.

The Magi were like scientists in their day. They studied our world all the time to see how it worked...to find the One who created it. God gave them the star, a special sign, like a clue that they could find, and to follow it from Persia all the way to Bethlehem.

**Ask:** *Have you ever looked up into the sky at night for clues about God? What do you feel when you see the stars and planets in the sky?*

Throughout the Bible God said He would send a Hero to rescue the Israelites. God came as a baby through Joseph and Mary, who were Israelites. But God wasn't just sending a Son to rescue one nation. He wanted to rescue all of the nations! When God put His clues in the sky He was telling everyone that His Son would be available to the whole world. All they had to do was seek and look for Him. When the Magi found Jesus, they gave His family 3 very expensive gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. And they bowed and worshipped Him as a King.

**Ask:** *Gold was a gift meant for kings. Frankincense was a gift for priests. (It was used to anoint and heal people.) Myrrh was a useful painkiller and also used to embalm bodies before they were put in caves. Why do you think they gave Jesus these 3 gifts?*

As we continue through Advent we keep seeing that God is generous. He sends the Rescuer, His only Son to earth, and He announces His birth



with an angelic choir. Now we learn that He even put a sign in the skies to announce this Good News to people who were far away. God desires that all people know about him so they can love Him just as much as you do. And God promises that one day in the future people from all tribes, and nations and countries will know and love Him. Even now that is happening across the world.

**Ask:** *Sometimes it is hard to share things because we lose some of what we have. How is sharing the Good News of Jesus different?*

### **Poem to Read**

It wasn't long after some wise men came by.  
They had followed a star that appeared in the sky.  
They knew that a King had been born for the Jews  
So they stopped at the palace of Herod for clues.

"Where is the new King?" They wanted to know.  
Bethlehem was the answer – and so they did go.  
They followed the star 'till it came to the place  
Where they found little Jesus. Oh, the joy on their face!

They offered him gifts – Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh.  
Mary couldn't believe what was happening to her.  
For her little baby was clearly a King  
He was worshiped, adored, and caused angels to sing.

He was Someone so special, in fact, was divine!  
(Author Unknown)



### **Song**

Sing this song together as a family (Karaoke Version)

[O Come All Ye Faithful](#)

### **Prayer**

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*

## ***Family Activities***

**Education:** Do you have a globe or a world map? Can you find one online? Begin by looking at all the countries in the world. What language do they speak in each country? What place would each child would like to visit, and why?

Point out China, North Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia. These are just some of the places where people are not free to worship or talk about God. What would it be like to live in one of those countries? Do you think people try to talk to God there? How?

**Action:** Do you know of anyone who does a really good job of telling everybody about Jesus, like a missionary, or a pastor or friend? Can you pray for them this week? Write a note of encouragement as a family and thank them for loving Jesus and sharing his Good News.

**Have fun:** God gave the Magi a bright star to follow to Jesus. Have fun creating and following stars in your house.

- Take a small bag and poke holes in the bottom, no more than an inch or two in size. Turn off all the lights and take flashlights and shine the light through the bag onto the ceiling.
- Turn off all the lights and shine a flashlight for the children to follow around the house.
- Ball up a piece of yellow paper to represent a star. Take turns hiding and finding it around the house.

# Christmas Eve

## *The Plan*

# Christmas Eve

## *Family Discipleship Time*

**Set aside 30 minutes tonight to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. If you have Advent Candles, please designate someone to light all 4 candles, and then after reading the scripture below have someone light the center (5th) Christ candle.**

Isaiah 53:1–10 (NLT)

*Who has believed our message?*

*To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?*

*My servant grew up in the Lord's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground.*

*There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.*

*He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.*

*We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.*

*He was despised, and we did not care.*

*Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!*

*But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins.*

*He was beaten so we could be whole.*

*He was whipped so we could be healed.*

*All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.*

*We have left God's paths to follow our own.*

*Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.*

*He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word.*

*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.*

*And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.  
Unjustly condemned, he was led away.  
No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short  
in midstream.*

*But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people.  
He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone.  
But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.*

*But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him and cause him grief.  
Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants.  
He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord's good plan will prosper in his hands.*

### **Light Christ Candle**

#### **Focus**

What do you think these verses mean? Do you remember what we talked about in Advent Week 1, that the world was broken and needed a Rescuer? So what was God's plan to fix everything for us?

#### **Poem to Read**

For small baby Jesus would grow to man,  
Would live without sin, and would follow God's plan.  
He would die on a cross but would rise three days later  
To trade all my sin for something much greater.

And that's the true story of how Christ was born.  
We have so much to celebrate on Christmas morn.  
For God loved the world so much that He gave  
His only dear Son, for each person to save.

By trusting in Jesus, our sins are forgiven  
We have life eternal, the promise of heaven.  
And all because Jesus was born on that night.  
The High King of Heaven came to make all things right.



## **Song**

Sing this song together as a family

[Silent Night, Holy Night](#)

## **Prayer**

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.

## **Family Activities**

**Give Back:** Do the children have money? If not, give them some as a gift, and ask if they would be willing to give it to someone else. Collect all the treasure and put it in an envelope with an anonymous note of encouragement. Now, have the children decide who should receive the money.

On the way home from Christmas Eve service or before bedtime drive to that home, say a prayer for them, and place the gift at their door. As you drive home talk about how God must have been excited and sad to send His great Gift (Jesus) to earth.

**Communal Surprise:** Have everyone open one gift that you have prepared. (Make sure to include yourselves.)

Everyone gets new pajamas to wear on Christmas Eve!

Or choose a surprise that will commemorate this Advent, and everyone gets a version of the same gift.



All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page

# Week 5

*There's More To Come*

# WEEK 5

## *Personal Study*

Luke 21:25–28 (ESV)

*“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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.”*

2 Peter 3:8–13 (ESV)

*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.*

### **Focus**

What are some big events that you have prepared for? How much time did you spend making sure you were ready for that event, trip or experience? Why was it important to take the time to get ready and be prepared?



## ***We Prepare***

It seems like we spend a lot of time preparing for things we care about. For many of us Christmas is one of those seasons that require preparation. We adjust schedules, fill our calendars with events and experiences, we manage our budgets and make sure all the important people have a gift to open. Decorations are displayed well in advance, family members travel to spend time together, and meals must be prepared and created. There is intentionality at Christmas. There is joy and anticipation because the season is significant for so many.

Christmas is a real day. We go through all the trouble at Christmas because it actually comes every year...even on the same day in December.

Every year we spend so much energy and time in the remembering of Christ's first coming. How much more should we prepare for His second coming? That day is also a reality. But unlike Christmas Day, only the Father knows the Day of His Son's second coming. But He is coming. And if he does not come before we die, we will go to Him. And only the Father knows that day as well. Shouldn't we spend more time preparing for that Day?

## ***Already, But Not Yet***

The weeks immediately following Christmas can be blanketed in disappointment and regret. Did we spend too much money? Was all that time and preparation worth it? Am I ready for the soberness of a new year? We forget that the Israelites were not the only ones living in Wait and Hope. Even though the greatest gift has already come (and we celebrate that gift at Christmas by looking back), we have forgotten that He left us, and when He did, promised to return again.

It is right and normal to feel a longing for something more. If we spend four of our weeks every year looking back in celebration and gratitude, how many weeks should we spend looking forward in Hope? The Bible says, all of them.

The author of the Book of Hebrews tells us to encourage one another, and all the more as "we see the Day approaching." Peter exhorted his readers in the scripture above to cling to a future day. He reminded them that, although the days seemed long and full of hardship and disappointment, that it was a reality that Christ would come again, and all things would be

made new! And then he asked them to prepare for that Day by living lives of holiness and godliness, proclaiming truth, exuding grace and moving forward in hopeful expectation. He even hinted that by doing so, Christ would come all the more quickly.

We, like Peter's listeners, are living in the days of God's patient mercy. God is not slow in keeping His promise to return. He is giving everyone enough time to make decisions, and to bow their knees in willing submission before it is forced upon them. Maybe we could turn our sadness and longing into joyful expectation by bending our lives fully into the promised "not yet" of Christ's glorious return?

Are you preparing for His return? As this Advent season comes to a close take some time to evaluate your heart's lament. What is your reason to wait? Where are you pinning your hopes and dreams?

Let us, the people of God, be found ready in the waiting. May your heart be filled with a future promise and your eyes brightened with all the things Christ will heal when He returns. Even more, we pray that your heart will long for your groom Himself, because He will be here before you know it.

### ***Reflection***

What did you write on your card to place on the "Waiting Place" at Eternal Church? Would you change that card now, or keep it the same?

What does Peter say we should be waiting for in the scripture above?

What are your hopes and dreams for this life? How much emphasis do you place upon this earthly life to fulfill your hopes and dreams?

How does your life reflect your belief that Jesus Christ will return? Do others in your life, who know you well, get a sense that your disappointment can only go so low because you are waiting on something so great?

Read Romans 8:22-25 and Revelation 21:1-7. Let God speak to you.

## ***Closing Response***

One way the people of God prepare for Christ's return is to reveal the healing available in the new kingdom by caring for the elderly, poor, weak, hungry, imprisoned, outcasts, orphans and outsiders in this temporary earthly kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46).

As you look ahead to the new year, think of practical and intentional ways you and your people (family, group of friends) can take steps toward caring for these vulnerable populations in our area of Fort Mill, Rock Hill and Charlotte.

Hebrews 10:23-25 tells us to hold firm to our hope, and to never forsake meeting together so that we can encourage one another toward love and good deeds. The pandemic has isolated many of us physically and emotionally. Sometimes we believe the lie that we can find community virtually with people who agree with us in the small things, instead of moving into the unity God desires physically and spiritually with the people who agree with us in the biggest things.

Can you see how evil unseen forces have used the past two years to isolate and separate God's people? Do you know some who have left "the church?" Or do you feel like it is the church who left some people? What is your response in combating what Satan is clearly trying to do? How does focusing on a future hope help you in that regard?



### ***Songs for Week 5***

- [No More Night](#) (please close eyes and listen)
- [You Hold Me Now](#)
- [Soon](#)
- [Home Where I Belong](#)

### ***Prayer***

Almost all of our deep disappointments come because our hopes are misplaced. Pray that this year we will be healed, not because our circumstances will get better, but because we promise to put our hopes upon a future Day.



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*

# WEEK 5

## *Family Discipleship Time*

***Set aside 30 minutes one night this week to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. Light only the Christ candle with no other candles present.***

### **Scripture Reading** ***(Have a family member read out loud)***

Luke 21:27–28 (NLT)

*Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!*

James 5:7–8 (The Message)

*Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.*

*"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," said Jesus. "I'll be there soon."*

**THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

### **Focus**

The Christmas Season is over. The gifts have all been opened. How does that make you feel? What are you looking forward to in the next year now that Christmas is over?

### **Story Telling (Read the commentary below)**

Jesus came, just like He said He would. But the promises are not over. He promised more than just that one great Gift. He also promised that he would return again, but the next time, not as a baby, but as a returning King. In glory. In power. Not in a secret hidden way, but in a way that the whole world will see Him at the very same time.

When Jesus came the first time as a baby He was coming to save us from the sin that lives in our hearts. He came to pay for the hurt that we caused when Adam and Eve rebelled, and from the consequences that we deserve because we all still hurt people when we sin today. But when He comes again He will save all of us from all of the hurt in the world. He will come to make things all new again, like they were in the Garden of Eden, but even better. Nobody will EVER hurt or cause hurt again, and we will live in a city filled with goodness!

**Ask:** *When Jesus returns to make all things new again, what are some things that hurt us that will be gone forever?*

*What are other ways that heaven may be different from our earth now? (No crying, afraid, alone, hungry, poor, etc)*

Just like before, God has given us hints and clues about how and when Jesus will return. And just like before there is no way we can be sure when it will happen. So, just like before, we wait. Sometimes it is fun and exciting to wait for something, like Christmas morning. But sometimes it is really hard to wait, especially when we don't even know when it will happen. It is also hard to wait because it means that we must live in a world where we hurt people, and people can hurt us, until He comes back again. Some people don't even think about Jesus coming back again, and they even forget that He promised to do it.

**Ask:** *Do you think about Jesus coming again? What do you think we should do as we wait?*

When Jesus comes again it will be very different from the first time. We aren't sure what it will look like, but we know that everyone will know about it, not just shepherds and a few Magi. The Bible says that He will ride out of the sky on a great white horse and carry a sword. He will come to wage war and defeat sin and all who choose evil. He will defeat Satan and all

of his evil unseen army of demons. We will finally be free from the evil that exists on the earth. We will finally be free from the evil that we sometimes choose to follow in our own hearts. We will be free to love everyone the way He created us to love. All of the earth will be healed, and all of the bad things that have happened on the earth will be undone. We will live forever with Him, with animals and plants in a world that will never be scarred by sin again. We will worship Him as our King and Lord, as He deserves, forevermore.

**Ask:** *God sent His Rescuer once. He promised that He would do it again someday. Why do you think we still need to be rescued? What is still wrong with our world? What is still wrong with our own hearts witnessed in some of our decisions and behaviors?*

### **Reflection**

Did you feel sad after Christmas morning was over? Why do you think that was? Spend some time discussing as a family how everything that is even a good gift on earth isn't enough to really make us happy for very long. We won't truly be satisfied until Jesus returns to make all things, including our hearts and minds, new.



### **Song** *(Sing together as a family)*

- [Soon](#)
- [Soon And Very Soon](#)
- [You're Coming Back](#)

### **Prayer**

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*

## ***Family Activities***

***Discussion:*** Ask your children questions about what they think Jesus' return will be like. Ask them if anything about that scares or confuses them. Assure them that when Jesus comes back it may be scary for some, but not for those who love and put their trust in Him. Talk about how the new world He is coming to reign over as King will be a place where there will be no sadness, sickness, fights or disease. A place where they can enjoy freedoms they never even knew they could have! A place where there are colors they have never seen, and food they have never tasted. A place where they can never play too much or sleep too long, or stay up too late. A place where there will never be homework or school because we will know everything. Dream with them about what it will be like, not to live in heaven, but to live on a new earth with everything as it should be.

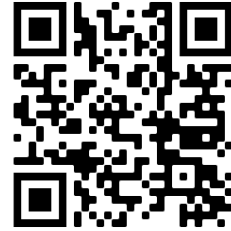
***Create:*** Draw or paint a picture of what it may look like when Jesus returns to earth as a King instead of a baby. Hang or display in a prominent place as a reminder of who your family places its hope in.

***Imagine:*** Go outside and look up at the clouds. When Jesus left He disappeared into the clouds. He didn't just keep going higher into outer space, he went through an invisible wall. The Bible says that when He returns He will come back through the clouds...pass through the invisible wall. Spend time imagining what Jesus' return will look like when all will see Him at the same time! Do all people even see the sun at the same time? Pray for Him to come to us quickly.

## RESOURCE PAGE



All resources in this study guide can be found and viewed by going to the online web page: **[eternalchurch.net/adventguide](https://eternalchurch.net/adventguide)**



**Resources are present for the following sections:**

**Preparing For Advent:** multiple resources for use during the season

**Week 1: *The Problem and The Promise***

Personal Study | Songs for Advent week 1

Family Discipleship Time | Song & Family Activities

**Week 2: *The Arrival***

Personal Study | Songs for Advent week 2

Family Discipleship Time | Song | Ornament Coloring Page & Cut-out

**Week 3: *The Announcement***

Personal Study | Songs for Advent week 3

Family Discipleship Time | Song

**Week 4: *The Gift For All***

Personal Study | Songs for Advent week 4

Family Discipleship Time | Song

**Christmas Eve: *The Plan***

Family Discipleship Time | Song

**Week 5: *There's More To Come***

Personal Study | Songs for week 5

Family Discipleship Time | Song



## ***Closing Credits***

There is a long list of hearts, minds and fingers that went into providing a resource like this to God's people at Eternal. The Lord has laid it upon my heart as a Pastor to try to be more purposeful, with the eager assistance of the Family Ministry, in providing resources to help our families be "in", but not "of" the world in which we live. This is an attempt in that direction.

Many thanks to the Village Church for providing so many open resources for Lead Pastors and ministry leaders. They created the needed structure for the concept of this Advent Guide. I was inspired by Paul David Tripp to work through the Advent season in the sermon message progression that has been laid out in this guide, and of course, apparent in the Bible.

Many of the events and activities have been inspired by my own family, and mostly my wife Heather, as we have sought to build unique and memorable Christmas experiences as a family here in South Carolina. She has continuously challenged me as the father of our children to be more purposeful in creating memories that have bound our family together.

A special thanks to Lauren Copeland and Melissa Williams for correcting, editing and adding fresh and unique ideas, songs and activities throughout this Guide. Without their expertise I would not have felt confident providing this resource to our Eternal families.

Also, thank you Chuck Williams for editing the final version, and Kristen Gardner for not only designing this resource, but working so diligently to create a space online to guide our people to the suggested resources.

Thank you Bill Gardner for your expert craftsmanship on providing a physical "Waiting Place" that will give our church family an emotional and communal touchpoint at Eternal services every Sunday.

Many hearts, many minds and many fingers indeed!

However, the real credit for this Guide can be seen and heard in all of the scriptures and the true stories that tie it together, from beginning to end.

There is only One who is worthy of deserved gratitude, and that is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and His Father who always had a Plan to rescue His beloved creation. Without Him there would be nothing to write, no story to tell, no guide to assist and no reason to worship. We do not wait as those who put their hope on earthly passing celebrations...for we, as God's people, are waiting for a Reason.

Bless you and yours this Christmas season.

Pastor Don