

Advent 2023



# Introduction

I love this time of year with the decor, music, food, traditions, and parties. The constant busyness during this season risks losing the reason we celebrate this time of year. Celebrating Advent reminds me of the reason we have the food, parties, celebrations, and gifts. It brings into focus the reality that Jesus Christ is real. The goal for this booklet is to help you either individually or as a family spend each week reflecting on a theme with Scripture reading, reflection, and prayer. My prayer is that this will help reflect on Jesus Christ in all his glory.

## What is Advent?

Advent is the Latin word for “coming.” It is a season in the church calendar when we celebrate the first coming of Christ, in his incarnation, and his Second Coming when he comes in glory to usher in the New Heavens and New Earth. Incarnation means the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, took on human flesh. Meaning he became human.

Jesus needed to be human for many reasons. First, Jesus Christ’s obedience was completely righteous human obedience. He is/was righteous. He never wavered, sinned, withheld good, or committed any major or minuscule sin. No slip of the tongue. No “innocent gossip.” This is why we can be declared righteous by God. Jesus, in the flesh, was righteous in our place. Second, he died in our place as a man. He truly and fully paid the penalty for our sin by his death in our place. Third, we are now, by faith in the power of Spirit, united to his flesh. We remember these things and many more when we celebrate Advent. As was mentioned earlier, Advent is not just about remembering the first coming but anticipating the Second Coming. In the Old Testament, the people of God longed for the Messiah, for God to send a righteous king to make things right! We too long for Jesus to return. We wait eagerly for Jesus to make all things new.

In Christ,  
Pastor J.C.

## First Week - Hope

Our theme for this week is hope. Hope is a spirit-enabled virtue that allows us to expect the promises found in scripture to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In other words, it is a firm conviction about the future. Many counterfeit hopes capture our attention and imagination of the good life. For some, it may be the hope that the next event, purchase, or evening spent binging on Netflix will bring fulfillment. For others, it may be the hope that loneliness and emptiness will be filled with shallow online interactions. The gospel gives us hope that is wider, deeper, and more fulfilling than any potential alternative.

### Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Reflection:

In this passage, we read a message of hope. Paul is giving thanks and praise to the Father for the grace that was bestowed upon the church. He is prayerful that they are growing in their words and their knowledge. If you were to keep reading, you would find it remarkable that Paul has such high praise for this church, considering the issues they struggled with.

Ultimately, we see the praise is not for them but for the work God is doing in them. Paul has hope in the promise that Jesus Christ will sustain this body of believers until the end. Why does he have such hope? Because he knows that God is faithful, he keeps his promises even when we don't. The hope that we celebrate during Advent is that God is at work in us and will fulfill his promise of making all things new.

### Reflection Questions:

For the children:

1. How often do you make promises? Do you find it hard to keep them?
2. Do you believe God always keeps His promises?

For everyone:

1. Where do you misplace your hope?
2. How can you place your hope in the promises of God?

### Prayer:

Lord, we confess there are many times that we place our hope in the wrong things. We are attracted and distracted by many alternatives to the true hope that lasts. Forgive us for lacking true hope. Forgive us for following the desires of our wayward hearts. Please give us the strength to hope in your promises and to be satisfied. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Second Week - Peace

Our theme for the second week is peace. Often, when we think about peace, we conjure up images of world peace, which essentially means the absence of conflict. The biblical view of peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but it means harmony, wholeness, or well-being. It is captured by the Hebrew word “shalom.” The reason why we even need the word “shalom” is because the Fall brought conflict. This conflict is not rectified by ignoring it or by playing nice and pretending it isn’t there. Nor is it fixed through agreeing to disagree. Biblical peace comes through reconciliation.

### Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-2

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD’s hand  
double for all her sins.

### Reflection:

What does peace look like to you? For me, peace often looks like two things: the absence of conflict in my life and a quiet home. That may seem nice, but that is not the type of peace we need.

Whatever picture captures your view of peace, true and lasting peace is found in our Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus Christ came to bring reconciliation and harmony. Our sin and rebellion against God began by choosing to be the master of our lives. This choice brought disunity and conflict. The only way to restore our fellowship with God was for the Prince of Peace to come here on earth. He had to live among us. He had to obey the Father. Where we would have broken peace and entered into conflict, Jesus

obeyed. Ultimately, he provided the way of reconciliation through his life, death, and resurrection. Ephesians 2:15-16 says, “so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” And as we look at Isaiah, we see that our sin has been healed and that the warfare is over. This passage refers to the Messiah, to Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can make peace. It is through his work that we can receive the blessings of his peacemaking.

Our reading points us to the true meaning of Christmas. Jesus Christ was not just a good man, a moral teacher, or a prophet. He is the one who made it possible for us to have peace with God. I can't think of a more extraordinary gift than the gift of peace offered to us in Jesus Christ.

### Reflection Questions:

For the children:

1. What are some ways that people fight? Where have you seen that happen?
2. How do fights usually end?
3. Do we need peace with God? If so, how do we get peace with Him?

For everyone:

1. What does peace look like?
2. How did Jesus Christ bring peace?
3. What is one way you can reflect on the Prince of Peace this week?

### Prayer:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have made peace possible. Father, we thank you for appointing salvation. Blessed Son, we praise you for accomplishing our salvation. Holy Spirit, our comforter, we are grateful for the application of our salvation. Lord, help us embrace the peace you have granted us. We ask that you equip and empower us to be peacemakers. We pray this in the name of our Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen

## Third Week - Joy

The theme for this week is joy. Joy is closely related to gladness and happiness, but joy is more a state of being than an emotion; it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). Having joy is part of the Christian life. The first coming of Christ is a source of tremendous joy, and the second coming will be the culmination of joy.

As a historical note, you may have noticed that the candle used to symbolize Joy is pink. This is likely because the Catholic Church patterned Advent after Lent. On the fourth Sunday, the Pope gave citizens a pink rose. The priests began to wear pink vestments on that Sunday. The church brought the pink vestment tradition to the third Sunday of Advent.

### Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61:1–4

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

4 They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

### Reflection:

The theme of joy is significant in the Bible, and we are called upon to choose joy. Now, choosing to be joyful does not mean we ignore or minimize the realities of our sinful world and the pain and suffering it brings. It means that we can be joyful amid difficult circumstances because joy is not a mere inward disposition but an outward trust in God.

This passage mentions several elements of joy brought about by God's work. First, the Lord has brought good news to the poor. Second, he has bound up the brokenhearted. Third, he has liberated those who were captive. These actions bring about a response of joy, as seen in verse 3 with the reference to the oil of gladness. We see the dawn of joy breaking through when Jesus was born; angels brought good news of great joy. Luke 2:10–11 tells us, "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 David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The ultimate joy Jesus brings is the salvation that God promised. This is why the apostle Paul could endure what seemed to be impossible circumstances with joy. He calls the church to be sorrowful yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10). It's through the lens of joy found in Christ and His promise to make all things new, that we can endure hardship, experience lament, and choose to trust God.

#### Reflection Questions:

For the children:

1. How can a Christian experience sad things, but also have joy?

For everyone:

1. What is the difference between happiness and joy?
2. How is Jesus Christ your source of joy?
3. How can choosing to trust the Lord bring you joy?

#### Prayer:

Lord, we confess that we often confuse joy with happiness. Give us ears to hear and eyes to see that those are not the same. We, as followers of Christ, have every reason to be joyful. Help us to hold on to joy amid hardship. Help us to have joy when we experience disappointment. Lord, we ask that we would remember your promises. That you will forgive us, cleanse us, renew us, and be present with us. Lord, give us joy as we celebrate the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray this in His Name. Amen!



## Fourth Week - Love

Our fourth week's theme is love. But what is love? So often in our culture, love is viewed as a feeling which ebbs and flows; it waxes and wanes. Sometimes love is portrayed as something to fall into or out of. Yet, God's love is more sure, more secure, more significant than any love we have ever experienced. As we prepare to celebrate Christ's first advent and anticipate His second, we know it is because of love, that He came.

### Scripture Reading: Psalm 89:1-5

1 I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

2 For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."

3 You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:

4 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.' "

5 Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

### Reflection

This Psalm speaks of God's steadfast love and his faithfulness. It also has a future orientation referring to the building of faithfulness and steadfast love. When we hear these words, what comes to mind? When we think of steadfastness or faithfulness, we can think of something that is solid, sure, and un failing. Even when we fail, God will not; indeed, he cannot fail. That is the good news of the gospel. When we picture God's love, sometimes we may be tempted to think that God loved us reluctantly, that the only way he could stomach us was for Christ to come. Yet this passage, and many others in Scripture, paints a different picture. It was God's love for us that compelled the Father to send the Son. It was the Son's love

that made him willing to be sent. Through Christ, the Lord kept his covenant with David, depicted in this Psalm.

Through the sacrificial gift of Jesus, we see God's Love manifested for all to see. In his book, "Faith Hope Love," Mark Jones writes that "Love binds God to his people." There can be no stronger bond, for it finds its basis in the bond of love existing between the three persons of the Trinity. Thus, when we are bound to God in love, we share in the life of the triune God.<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:8 tells us that God is Love. It's because of God's great love for his people that we celebrate Advent.

Some of us enter into this time of year thinking of all the disappointments we've experienced. Perhaps you think of the ways you have sinned against the Lord, and you feel like His love for you has reached its breaking point. That cannot happen! God is love! He demonstrated that through the gift of His Son. I encourage you as we anticipate His second coming to rest in His love.

### Reflection Questions:

For the children:

1. When was the last time you said, "I love you."?
2. What is one word from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 that makes you think about God's love?

For everyone:

1. How do you define love?
2. How does 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 define love?
3. How do we see 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 exemplified in Jesus Christ?

### Prayer:

Lord God Almighty, thank you for your continual love for us. We confess that we struggle to believe that you love us when we fail and fall short. Please forgive us for doubting your goodness and your love us. Lord, we ask that you would encourage us with your love and grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.

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# Christmas Eve - Jesus Christ

On this evening, we recall Christ's first coming. Jesus Christ turned the world upside down. He declared the Kingdom of God, and he defeated our three great enemies: sin, death, and Satan. We celebrate Christmas Eve by looking to Jesus Christ. The God-Man. The only one who could reconcile us with the Father.

## Scripture Reading: John 3:16–21

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

## Reflection:

Let me repeat the question asked a couple of weeks ago: what does peace look like to you?

As great as your picture of “peace” may appear, this is not the vision of peace found in our Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. You see, Jesus Christ came to bring reconciliation and harmony. Our sin and rebellion against God began by choosing to be the master of our lives, which brought disunity and conflict. The only way to restore our fellowship with God was for the Prince of Peace to come here on earth. He chose to live among us while obeying the Father. Where we would have broken peace and entered into conflict, Jesus obeyed. Ultimately, he provided a way of reconciliation through his

life, death, and resurrection. Ephesians 2:15-16 says, “so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”

This passage points us to the true meaning of Christmas. Jesus Christ was not just a good man, a moral teacher, or a prophet. He is the one who made it possible for us to have peace with God. I can't think of a more extraordinary gift than the gift of peace offered to us in Jesus Christ. Can you?

Prayer:

Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, we are thankful for humbling yourself and becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Holy Spirit, we praise you for awakening us to the truth of the gospel. Blessed Trinity, we also look forward to the day when the work that was started at Jesus' birth will be completed at His second coming. Until then, please help us to remain hopeful.

