

Advent Devotional

PREPARE HIM ROOM

2020



WHAT IS ADVENT?

In Latin, advent means “coming” or “arrival.” Advent is the season in which the Church looks forward to the coming of Christ. This year’s theme, ‘prepare Him room,’ is a reference to the traditional Christmas hymn, *Joy to the World*. This 18th century hymn celebrates the second coming of Christ and reminds us to intentionally focus on Christ amidst the hustle of this season. Today, during advent, we remember the miraculous birth of Jesus and the Old Testament promises that foretold his arrival. We also anticipate and look forward with hope to the return of Christ. As believers, we live between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus. Advent is a joyful time to rejoice in the presence of God. Advent is also full of the expectation and anticipation of Christ’s return.

This season, set aside time to draw closer to God with gratitude for the self-giving love that finds its expression in the Son of God. Each week you’ll be guided through scripture passages that invite you to reflect on your own journey as you prepare room in your heart for the Savior.

Week 1 The Before Time

Week 2 The In-Between Time

Week 3 The Incarnation

Week 4 The Greatest Commandment

THE INCARNATION

Week Three

December 13 - December 19



The Incarnation

Isaiah 11:1-6

The Branch From Jesse

¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord
³ and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or
decide by what he hears with his ears;

⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the
earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.

John 1:10-14

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made
through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came

to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God –

¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Sometimes we hear a story so often the story loses the wonder and awe we felt when we first heard it. Think about the stories you've been told over and over. Do you still feel that same sense of curiosity that you did when you first heard it? Maybe for you the story of your birth has been told so many times that you now roll your eyes at the telling. Similarly, there are passages of Scripture we might take for granted because we're so familiar with the text.

The incarnation is mind blowing. God became flesh and made his home among us. The most surprising act of God was the choice to reveal Himself in a new way. God came down to dwell with living flesh and entered into the human condition. John uses the word, "dwell," to describe the visible presence of God. There are other times in Scripture where God's presence was made known. On numerous occasions in the wilderness, God's glory dwelt with the Israelites wherever they pitched the tabernacle. In a

mysterious way God's presence filled the tabernacle. God was with the Israelites but not one of the Israelites.

Today, the incarnation is a big neon sign pointing to God's love for humanity. John declares that Jesus was full of grace and truth. Grace is the gift of forgiveness and mercy that God extends to us through the sacrifice of Christ. The grace of God is a gift that we don't deserve. The grace of God is not something we can earn or work for, it is freely given out of God's love for us. The word, "truth," means to uncover or reveal something. Full of truth, Jesus is the full revealing of God to humankind. This season we rejoice in the revealing of Jesus, the embodiment of God's deep well of love for us.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What favorite stories do you love to tell over and over? Why?

What favorite stories do you love to hear time and time again? Why

Jesus Christ revealed God's love for the world. What other characteristics of God did Jesus reveal?

Face to Face

Genesis 32:30

Jacob Wrestles With God

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Exodus 33:19-23

Moses and the Glory of the Lord

¹⁹ And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ "But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

²¹ Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

John 1:1-3, 18

The Word Became Flesh

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Revelation 22:1-4

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Removed from classrooms, office buildings, and houses of worship, the majority of 2020 has been spent interacting with people through a screen or a mask. The technological advancements of today are phenomenal, but even with online interactions, something falls flat. Something vital is missing in our relationships when we can't hug or hold our loved ones. In addition, we can all agree it is hard to get to know someone when you can't see if they are smiling or frowning. From a very young age, infants learn to recognize the faces of their parents. We carry this facial recognition into our teen and adult years, yearning for familiar faces in the crowd.

As the months drag on, we've adjusted and adapted, never forgetting a time when we were able to see each other face to face. In light of Covid-19, we've learned how important in person interactions really are to our emotional and physical wellbeing. It's no surprise then that people like Jacob and Moses desired to see the face of God, to see the full glory of God. Jacob recognized that a divine interaction occurred when he wrestled with a mysterious man in the middle of the night. Jacob, however, was not unscathed by the interaction. He was changed in a way that left him with a weakness and a new name.

John's gospel begins a little differently than the other gospels. He takes us all the way back to the beginning of creation and proclaims that Christ is eternal, present from the very beginning. Christ is also *with* God. John means Christ is face to face with God. Because Christ has been face to face with God and equal with God, only Christ is able to reveal what God is truly like, how much God loves and cares for us. If we want to know what God is truly like, we don't need to look any further than Jesus.

John not only takes us back to the beginning of all things but he also takes us through to the end of time. In a beautiful picture of worship, Revelation shows us that there will be a day when we will circle around the throne of God and see the full glory of God face to face.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Think about the people you haven't been able to see face to face in many months. Lift each one of those people up in prayer and ask God to be a comforting presence for them. Make it a priority to connect with the people on your list.

December 15 | Day 17

With You

Leviticus 9:1-7

The Priests Begin Their Ministry

¹ On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. ² He said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf for your sin offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and present them before the Lord. ³ Then say to the Israelites: 'Take a male goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb – both a year old and without defect – for a burnt offering, ⁴ and an ox and a ram for a fellowship offering to sacrifice before the Lord, together with a grain offering mixed with olive oil. For today the Lord will appear to you.'"

⁵ They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. ⁶ Then Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you."

⁷ Moses said to Aaron, "Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded."

Hebrews 4:14-16

Jesus the Great High Priest

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

There's a difference between going through a life changing event and knowing about a life changing event. We can study the American Revolution or the Great Depression, but we stand removed from the experiences of those who lived through it. Generations who come after us will wonder what it was like to live through the pandemic of 2020. Only those of us who live through this time will know the full effects of the fear, uncertainty, and creativity that has been expressed through this time.

In the Old Testament, priests were the mediators between God and the people. They represented the people to God and drew people into the presence of God. Priests needed to be tied to the ones they represented, while also having access to God. In worship they were responsible for offering sacrifices on behalf of the people. In the letter to the Hebrews, we find a different kind of priest. Jesus didn't offer sacrifices on behalf of the people, he became the sacrifice and offering to God. What's more he knows intimately what it's like to struggle and wrestle with temptation. Jesus knows, feels, and understands what it means to be human. He knows the limitation and frailty of our human bodies. This knowledge is not something that Jesus observes and judges while standing at a distance. Instead, Jesus entered into our condition with us.

The incarnation is a reminder that God is with us. Whatever you are going through you are not alone. Jesus is able to empathize with our struggles and pain. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel their pain. Because Jesus understands our pain, he responds with compassion to our hurts. When you know someone is sharing in your pain, the burden is easier to bear. Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet he never gave in to the sin and temptation. For this reason, we can approach God confidently in our grief and pain because Jesus has gone before us. He has paved the way for us to approach God where we receive mercy and grace in our time of need.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What would you like future generations to know about the pandemic of 2020? What changes would you like to see after this pandemic is over?

Identify an event in your life that you felt you went through alone. Can you look back and identify significant people who showed up and were present for you in your pain?

Think of a time in your life when someone showed you empathy. How did that affect you?

What changes in your life knowing that God is with you and you are not alone?

December 16 | Day 18

You're One of Us

Genesis 12:1-3

The Call of Abram

¹ The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Matthew 1:1-17

Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

¹ This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers
at the time of the exile to Babylon.

¹² After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,

¹⁵ Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of
Mary, and Mary was the mother of
Jesus who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from
Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to
Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

The genealogies found in Scripture are not the most interesting material. If we are being honest, many of us would admit we skip over the long list of names that may or may not mean anything to us. Each person on this list was a real live human and an important part of God's plan.

Contained within these lists are stories of drama, heartache, struggle, and redemption.

Matthew starts off his account of Jesus' life by using a familiar Jewish method of identifying a person - their genealogy. Matthew is concerned with grounding Jesus' identity deep within Israel's history and story. By presenting his lineage, Matthew is able to say, "He's one of us." Matthew calls Jesus the Son of David and the son of Abraham. Both David and Abraham were firmly established in relationship with God through covenants.

In his old age, Abraham was promised a son. He believed God and followed God's commands to the end of his life. Through Abraham, all the families of the earth were blessed. Jesus, as part of Abraham's line, is that promise fulfilled. Jesus is also part of the tribe of Judah, the same tribe that King David came from. David was promised a descendant from his line who would rule and usher in a kingdom of righteousness that would never end. Jesus is that promised king and his anticipated kingdom is coming.

Jesus is one of us in more than one way. The Son of God entered into the world as an infant, just like all of us do. He didn't appear on some distant mountain with clouds and smoke. He was born into a family. He was part of a family with struggles and trials. He also suffered death, the final human experience. He's one of us, but also not one of us. He was able to accomplish what we could not; he lived a sinless life and followed God's will perfectly. We

find comfort in the ways that Jesus was one of us and rejoice in the ways that Jesus was not one of us.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Abraham followed God and was a blessing to others. How can you bless others during this season?

Who is in your family genealogy? What stories do you know about where your family comes from? Why is it important to know our family stories?

December 17 | Day 19

Life and Light

John 1:4-9

⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Living through the pandemic of 2020 feels a lot like learning to walk in the dark. In the darkness we slowly inch forward grasping for sturdy ground, trying to make out shapes in the darkness and objects to avoid. At times we stumble and get up again. If you've ever gone from a pitch-black room into the bright light of day you know the experience of harsh blinding light that reveals everything. Jesus is that light that reveals everything. Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness of our lives. The light that guides our steps as we slowly inch forward. Jesus is the light of the world and Jesus is calling us to live transformed lives by inviting us to step into the light. The darkness and the light are not equal forces. The light is more powerful and shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Throughout John's gospel he draws a connection between the life and light of Jesus. Jesus came so that through him we would be full of life. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10b). When we read the word, "full," we might think of a busy or packed life. A life that is full is always on the go, producing things, and achieving success. That's not at all what Jesus means when he says he came so that we would

have a full life. Jesus came to set us free from the destruction of sin in our lives. Living a full life doesn't mean we have a license to do everything. Living a full life means we know life is worth living because Christ has set us free. We have been freed for a reason. We are called to live a higher quality of life, not a longer life. In Jesus, we have life after death, an eternal life that cannot be taken away.

PRAY AND REFLECT

Have you accepted Jesus' invitation to step into the light and live a life of freedom? Take some time to pray through the invitation that Jesus has extended to you.

December 18 | Day 20

Sabbath

Take a break to rest in God's presence and worship the Lord.

December 19 | Day 21

Silence & Stillness

In the midst of a busy holiday season, set aside time today to be silent and still before the Lord. Remove your devices and any distractions. Find a place where you can be alone, even if just for a few minutes.