



2014

CELEBRATING THE FAITHFULNESS OF OUR GOD

Advent

Introduction

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

1 Peter 1:8-13

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:19-21

Our King is coming. Jesus Christ has come and he is coming again. This is the hope that is celebrated during the Advent season. Advent, from the Latin word meaning “arrival” or “coming” is all about Jesus. It is a time for His Church around the world to remember his first coming as a humble child in Bethlehem as we also eagerly await his second coming in glory.

This is a season of watching and waiting. It is a season for celebrating the faithfulness of our God, who 2000 years ago made good on his promise to send a Savior. It is a time for reflection, for the renewing of our minds, for setting aside the busyness and consumerism that so often overwhelm us during this season so that our souls might be stirred up with affection for our great King.

History and Traditions

Advent officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and goes through Christmas Eve or Day. It originated as a period of fasting in preparation for the Feast of the Nativity (Christmas) in what is now France. While the pre-Christmas fast was observed as early as the fifth century, it was during the sixth century that the reading of particular prayers and Scripture passages began to be associated with Advent. While Advent comes at the end of the calendar year, it actually marks the beginning of the church year, and is thus an especially appropriate time for reflection, repentance and refreshment.

Advent has always been a time of remembrance, a time to look back and remember Christ's first coming. It has also had a forward-looking dimension, as it is a time to prepare for Christ's second coming at the end of history.

This season has been celebrated in a variety of ways by a variety of theological traditions through the centuries. One common tradition is the use of an Advent calendar during the month of December. Modern Advent calendars usually contain 24 "windows" that are opened in the days leading up to Christmas. Each window contains a poem, portion of Scripture, story, picture, or gift. As more windows are opened and Christmas day draws near, expectation increases. This is meant to remind us of a period of anxious yet hopeful waiting God's people experienced in the time leading up to Christ's first advent.

Candles are another popular Advent symbol. This symbol emphasizes the Scriptural teaching that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). Traditionally, a new candle is lit each week in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas Eve and represents Christ's first advent. The increasing light from the candles is meant to be a picture of the gospel, as we see this light penetrate the darkness.

The Advent season also often includes an emphasis on particular colors. Purple is the color first associated with Advent, as it is known as the color of repentance, and Advent was originally a time of repentance. More recently, some churches have begun to use blue, the color of hope. This is meant to remind us of the promise Christ made in his first coming that he would in fact come again, and it is a reminder that this season is not simply one of waiting for Christmas, but it is one where we are awaiting Christ's second coming.

As we enter into this season of Advent together as a faith family, it is a time for us to reflect on the reality of Christ's coming. We have the opportunity to rescue this season from commercialism and stress. The hidden treasure is allowing ourselves to assume a posture of expectant waiting as we prepare for Christmas, the celebration of our King.

Using this Guide

This guide contains four weeks of material, with brief devotional readings, study questions for you to complete individually or with a small group, and resources for helping families discuss Advent together. The guide also includes a Christmas Eve experience for families. You will also find appendices with additional resources for your Advent preparation.

Traditionally there have been four "watchwords" associated with the four weeks of Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Each week's reading centers around one of those concepts. While the material is not especially extensive, we want to encourage you to delve into it deeply. Linger on the Scripture passages, pray through them, take time to journal your answers to the response questions, and ask God what he might be wanting to say to you through this time of reflection.

We know that there are always seemingly endless demands on our time, and that is never more true than during this season. However, we believe that God's gracious invitation during this Advent season is to slow down, and be fully present to him and to others. We pray this might be a season where you are able to behold with fresh eyes the wonder of what God has done for us through the birth of His Son.

The Advent Invitation

This is the time of year when it seems like we blink and all of a sudden our schedule is filled with performances, parties, trips to see Christmas lights, and other holiday staples. Virtually everyone does this, whether they are followers of Jesus or not. Many of these Christmas-themed events can create an openness in those who don't yet know Christ that isn't present the rest of the year. This gives us the opportunity to help those far from God hear the story of Christ and experience God's love through His people.

In order to share God's love with those around us, we first need to give them our time. We must create space in our calendar and maybe even space in our homes to welcome our neighbors and friends to celebrate the season with us.

During this time of Advent we want to be the church by sharing the love of Christ with those around us. We want to encourage you to think about what it would look like for you and those close to you (your immediate family, your small group, or a group of friends at Bridgeway) to demonstrate God's life-transforming love in your neighborhoods and places of influence.

Take a look at Appendix A to get some practical ideas on how you can use one of our Advent Family devotionals to serve and share Jesus this Christmas. Just imagine our Body distributed throughout our community and region, connecting with those outside of God's family, so that they can see God's love in action and hear about the greatest treasure of all.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Advent Invitation Tips

Appendix B: Additional Activities for Families during the Advent Season

Appendix C: Additional Scriptures for study and reflection

Appendix D: Recommended Resources

Acknowledgements:

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible

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Thank you to the Village Church, Flower Mound, TX for their Advent template incorporated into this guide.

Week 1

Hope

NOVEMBER 29 – DECEMBER 5

Week 1

– INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE –

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.”

Psalm 130:5-6

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 1:5

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, “how will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”

Luke 1:26-39

Hurry Up and Wait

Wait.

Is there any less popular word in the English language? We are most certainly a people who do not like to wait. In an age of endless television channels, lightning-fast Internet, fast food that's getting faster and smart phones to distract us when we're standing in line, we're fast becoming a culture that doesn't have to wait. Waiting implies passivity and boredom, it's nothing more than a necessary evil that we endure before getting what we want. But is it possible that there is a different way to think about waiting?

Hope.

That's a much more exciting word, especially during the weeks leading up to Christmas. We hope we get the house decorated, gifts wrapped, and meals cooked before the holidays are upon us. We hope the family gathering goes well. Children hope the days before Christmas fly by, and that they get all of the gifts on their list. But is that really hope? Because it seems that the way we think about "hope" is really more about wishing than hoping. In fact, isn't it true that so much of the stress of this season comes from all of the stuff we "hope" for? Real hope isn't simply wishing for something to happen, rather it's having confidence in the promises of God.

Active Waiting

It's interesting that the Hebrew word for "wait" and the Hebrew word for "hope" are one and the same. Thus, we could also translate Psalm 130:5, "Hope in the Lord." In the reality of Jesus, hoping and waiting are one and the same activity. Waiting isn't passive, and hoping isn't wishing. This connection is all the more powerful in this season of Advent as we wait to celebrate Christ's coming at his birth, while also waiting for his triumphant return. Henri Nouwen calls this Advent posture "active waiting." It's not like waiting in line or waiting at a traffic light. There's nothing passive about it. But it's not frantic activity, like so much of what tends to define this season. Active waiting, according to Nouwen, means, "To be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening where you are and that you want to be present to it. A waiting person is someone who is present to the moment, who believes that this moment is the moment."

Far from being a necessary evil, the waiting of Advent is a beautiful hidden treasure in the busyness of the season. This season unfortunately is a glimpse of our everyday. The hope of Jesus hidden in our hurry.

We are invited to hope. We answer God's call to live fully present in this moment, with our hope fixed on the reality that God in his Son Jesus came for us. We put the weight of our life on the truth that God is good so we don't have to look elsewhere. We treasure Him because He is the Light of the world which no darkness can overcome, because he is alive in us in this moment, and that he will come again.

Reflection

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

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

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

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

Response

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

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

Talk with your family about scheduling The Advent Invitation and who to invite. Even better, make it a team project by working together with other Bridgeway'ers you are connected to through your small group, Bible study, ministry team, etc.

Songs of the Season

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Week 1

– FAMILY EXPERIENCE –

Set aside 15-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Optional material is a copy of the *Jesus Storybook Bible*.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

Isaiah 9:6

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.

Jesus Storybook Bible (The Terrible Lie)

If time allows, read the entire story **The Terrible Lie**.

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. In this world, there was no pain, no sadness, no hurt, no sin. God filled His world with all kinds of plants and animals and then He created Adam and Eve to live in His perfect world with joy and peace.

Ask: What is the most perfect thing you can think of?

But Adam and Eve disobeyed the instructions God had given them and they sinned. As a result, God's perfect world was broken. God is perfect and He cannot be near sin, so there was a consequence for their sin. Adam and Eve were separated from God due to their disobedience. All humans born after Adam and Eve also bear the punishment of their sin. But God did not send them out of His perfect Garden before making a promise. God promised that He would send a Rescuer, who would save Adam, Eve, and all of humanity from the punishment of sin. He promised to send a savior, and His name is Jesus.

Ask: How do you think Adam and Eve felt when God sent them from the Garden? How do you feel when you have a consequence for a bad choice?

God did not send Jesus to rescue His people as quickly as you might think! He waited thousands of years to send Him to redeem His broken world. During the waiting, God's people faced many challenges. Through the years, God gave clues and hints about Jesus. He described how Jesus would be born, what He would do and the kind of man He would be. We find these hints in Scripture, written by prophets of God, to remind people that their Rescuer was coming. These hints are called prophecies and we just read one from Isaiah 9:6!

Ask: What are some of the clues we see about Jesus in Isaiah 9:6?

In fact, we see over 350 prophecies about the Rescuer in the Old Testament and Jesus fulfilled them ALL!! God did not make promises He was not going to keep! Each time he fulfilled His promises to His children, it showed that He is trustworthy and would be faithful to send Jesus to rescue them from their sin. His children felt a lot of different emotions while they waited. Some days they waited with patience, other days they were fidgety and squirmy! At times, they were frustrated and sad, wondering if God remembered His promises, but He continued to remind them over and over that their King was coming. Until one day, when no one was expecting it, Jesus came.

Prayer

Ask one family member to pray and give thanks to God for his promise to send Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

Song

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

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

Family Activity

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

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

Additional Note:

Bridgeway Family Christmas Night

Friday, December 12

6:00-9:00pm

in the On-site Rocklin room

Enjoy a informal and relaxed evening with other Bridgeway families watching a Christmas movie, drink Hot Chocolate, fire pits, and more.

Week 2

Peace

DECEMBER 6-12

Week 2

– INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE –

“The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus shall you bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

Numbers 6:23-26

“Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die.”

Hark! The Herald Angel Sing

“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.””

Luke 2:8-14

Whole to the Soul

There is an ancient Hebrew prayer of blessing that God originally gave to Moses to give to Aaron to pray over the people of Israel. It's a blessing that has been woven into Jewish and Christian culture in the millennia since its inception. It's a beautiful prayer, asking for God's blessing, attentiveness, and grace to be upon the prayer's recipient. And then the final line of the prayer asks God to give peace.

The word "peace" in the Hebrew world signifies not simply the absence of conflict, but true wholeness or completeness. It's the ability to stop and take a deep breath. It's soul-level contentment. It causes life to rush by a little slower, the sun to shine a lighter brighter, our blood pressure to drop a few points, and those voices in our heads that keep us so rushed and worried to quiet down. When God speaks of peace, that's what he means.

In the scene that Luke recounts for us in Luke 2:8-14, some lowly nightshift shepherds are out in the fields watching their sheep—like they do every other night of their lives—when in a moment the unthinkable happens. In an event that shocked them just as much as it would shock you if it happened in your living room this evening, heaven breaks through and an angel of the Lord appears to them. This angel delivers news that seems almost too good to be true: Christ has come.

Wow.

The text tells us that when the angel appeared, the shepherds' kneejerk reaction was fear. Hard to blame them! And yet as the angels deliver their message, the message of Christ's coming, it builds to a glorious crescendo, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"(emphasis added).

In this season of ever-stuffed calendars, over-used ovens, and a seemingly endless list of obligations and demands, it is critical that we remember that when Christ came he brought a declaration of peace. So many of the voices we hear in this season tell us that to make this season memorable we have to buy all the right things, visit all the right places, and get our homes looking just right.

The prayer of blessing in Numbers 6 and the proclamation of the angels in Luke 2 tell us this is not true. In this season of giving and receiving, we are invited to receive from our Father a priceless gift that cannot be bought: the gift of peace. We welcome that gift by reflecting on this simple truth: Christ has come.

Let those words bounce around in your head until they make their way to your heart.

Christ has come, and with him the gift of peace. This treasure of infinite worth is an invitation to slow down. It's an invitation to breathe. It's an invitation to quiet our hearts and recognize that what our soul needs most can't be found at a shopping mall or a holiday party. As God met those shepherds in the field, so he meets us today with a beautiful message of peace for our busy and distracted hearts.

Reflection

Why do you think your peace is such a high priority for God?

If peace is a reflection of God's character (wholeness or completeness), how does the coming of Jesus to earth display God's character of peace?

Where do you desire the peace of God most in your life? Where are you lacking wholeness?

How can experiencing God's peace impact the way you interact with others during this season?

Response

What is one small adjustment you can make to your schedule that will allow you to more fully experience God's peace this Advent season?

Read Philippians 4:6-8 and identify any sources of anxiety in your life. Once you have done that, spend a few moments simply being quiet before God, and pray that His peace would fill your heart and home during this season.

Songs of the Season

Silent Night

While Shepherds Kept Their Watch by Night

Week 2

– FAMILY EXPERIENCE –

Set aside 10-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

Luke 2:3-7

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

Jesus Storybook Bible (He's Here!)

As time allows, read the entire story He's Here!.

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

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

After thousands of years of waiting, wondering, and anticipating the Rescuer, He came. On an ordinary night, Emmanuel came, God with us. And every one of the hints and clues God gave His people about how He would come, were fulfilled in Jesus. He told His people that the Rescuer would be born in Bethlehem, through the lineage of David, and not only would Jesus be a Ruler, He would bring peace.

Ask: When you finally get something you have been waiting for, how do you feel?

Many were looking for the Rescuer to be a soldier or even a political figure. No one expected a baby

but that is how Jesus made His appearance. The King had ordered everyone to return to their hometown to be counted for a census. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth and had to travel a great distance to the town of Bethlehem where Joseph's family was from.

Upon their arrival, they sought out a place to stay, but the town was full of visitors due to the census, so there was no place for them to lay their heads. The innkeeper helped them find a stable to stay in. While in Bethlehem, in a stable, the time came for Mary to give birth to her son, and Jesus, the Savior was born. Jesus, the Son of God, left his home of Heaven to be born to young earthly parents. He left the surroundings of Heaven to be born in a dirty, smell, animal filled stable. He laid down His rights as King to become helpless and fragile. He took off His majestic robes to be clothed in strips of simple cloth and placed, by the loving hands of His earthly Mom, in a box where animals would eat.

Ask: When you hear about the night that Jesus was born, does it sound like the birth of a King?

Our King was born just as God had planned and promised. Emmanuel, GOD with us, came. Jesus came, just like God said He would. The promise He made, He kept and His plan to rescue His people from sin, was born. And the world was changed for all eternity.

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for the sending Jesus to rescue us from our sin.

Song

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

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

Family Activity

This week after completing the activity you planned from last week, talk about the promise you made to your family during last week's family Advent time. Talk about how the hints and clues you gave them were fulfilled. Discuss the experience of waiting: Were they patient waiters or anxious waiters? Did they wonder when and where the promise would be fulfilled? When they experienced their activity, did it meet their expectations? Talk about how God faithfully fulfilled His promise in Jesus.

During the week walk outside on a clear night with your family and talk about the night Jesus was born. Talk about the night from the perspective of Mary and Joseph and how it might have felt to travel so far, how tired they must have felt and wonder where they would stay. Talk about how it must have felt to finally meet Jesus.

Week 3

Joy

DECEMBER 13-19

Week 3

– INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE –

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

Proverbs 4:23

*“You’re the joy joy joy lighting my soul
The joy joy joy making me whole
Though I’m broken, I am running
Into your arms of love”*

Rend Collective, “Joy”

*“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.””*

Luke 2:10

*“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be full.”*

John 15:5

Heart Check

How are things in your heart?

This is a great question to ask the people closest to you. It's an even better question to ask yourself. While we might breeze right by the question, "How are you doing?" (answering with one of the three acceptable responses: "Good", "OK", or "Fine"), asking "How are things in your heart?" requires a bit more reflection.

In Proverbs 4, Solomon tells us it's critical that we learn to keep, or keep watch over, our hearts. He uses poetic language to tell us that everything we do flows from our hearts. What is inside, comes out. If our hearts are dark, there is nothing external that can make up for that. Jesus touched on this idea as well, saying, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36) In other words, gaining the outside world doesn't do much good if your inside world is collapsing.

Looking from the outside, is there a greater hidden treasure that each of us owns than our heart? It is the ultimate hidden treasure of our life and soul.

So, think about the question for a moment: How are things in your heart? What has your attention? What are you hoping in? Where are you looking to for significance, worth, or value? What is consuming your time, attention, and focus?

Maybe you're a student, and it's the stress of papers and exams that December inevitably brings. Maybe it's the pain that comes with the holidays as you are forced to remember a recent loss or a relationship that has gone south. Maybe it's the stress of the season as you feel the weight of gifts to buy, people to please, hours to work, and traffic to rush. Maybe it's fear for what the new year will bring, or maybe your heart has simply grown numb. The truth is, we don't have to look far to find reasons to worry, fear, or fret, especially during this season. It's not difficult for our hearts to grow cold.

News for the Heart

And yet in the midst of the busyness and restlessness of our lives we are invited to remember the announcement first delivered to the shepherds on that night 2000 years ago: "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Good news of great joy for all people. So much of the stress that accompanies this season is brought on by the pursuit of temporary happiness. The good news the angel announced means we don't have to play that game. The coming of Jesus means real joy is possible. We can scramble around indulging in all sorts of joy-substitutes that only leave us wanting more, or we can receive the simple promise of God, that he brings joy.

So, how are things in your heart? If we are fixated upon anything other than Jesus, happiness may come and go, but joy will remain elusive. Worse, we may find the stress and trouble of this season overwhelming. But if we can still our anxious hearts for a moment and consider during this Advent season the simple truths that Christ has come, that he lives in us, and that he has shown us the path that leads to life, we open ourselves to real joy.

Reflection

What is the difference between keeping watch over our hearts and simply watching our behavior? Which is easier for you?

What is the difference between happiness and joy? Is your pursuit of happiness interfering with your ability to receive joy from God?

Response

It has been said, “pleasure is the measure of our treasure.” Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21) Spend 5-10 moments journaling your greatest areas of pleasure. Write down your answer to: what does this reveal about my heart?

In Matthew 6:19-20, Jesus tells us to lay up treasures in heaven instead of on earth. In other words, find our joy in the treasure of Jesus and not things. In your journal list, determine what earthly treasures that you need to lay down. Determine a step you will take this week to lay down that treasure to make room for greater joy by treasuring Jesus.

Commit to a step to “lay up” an attitude or action this week of treasuring Jesus. What habit, relationship, area of serving, conversation, etc. will you incorporate this week?

Songs of the Season

Joy to the World

Go! Tell it on the Mountain

Week 3

– FAMILY EXPERIENCE –

Set aside 15-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Optional material is a copy of the Jesus Storybook Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

Luke 2:14

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

Jesus Storybook Bible (The Light of the world)

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

Joy is the feeling of great pleasure or happiness. When we are full of joy on the inside, it comes out. Shouts. Smiles. We share our joy. We share what brings us joy. We want others to not only know what causes joy in us but we want others to experience the same joy we have.

Ask: What causes you so much joy that you just have to share it with others? When are you so happy that you shout about it?

The angels were so full of excitement and joy they shouted Hoorays! God's act of sending Jesus to earth moved the angels to sing and shout. They were amazed at the moment. They were in awe of God. It made them so full of joy on the inside that they could not contain it, they had to hoot and holler...God is amazing...God is awesome...there is nothing and no one bigger or better than our God!

Ask: How have you seen God act in your life or in our family that causes you to want to sing and shout?

God has created to be full of joy from the inside out. Jesus said He came to give us life full of joy. So, it is good and right for us to want to be joyful and to follow the path to find joy. The great news is that we know the path and the place to find joy. It is in the person of Jesus. To know all we can about Him. To act the way Jesus acted. To live the way Jesus lived. That is where joy starts on the inside and comes out in our songs, shouts, and sharing.

Seek Jesus. Serve Jesus. Sing to Jesus. Show and tell Jesus. These are steps on the path to joy. Hooray!

Prayer

Have a family member to express thankfulness for how God has given joy to each other through the good news of Jesus.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to Joy to the World

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing*

*Joy to the world! the Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat the sound joy*

Family Activity

Use a poster board or some other material for display around your home. On the display, make a list as a family of all the “good news” and great things you have experienced in the last year. Be creative in the items on the list and how you decorate the display. Have fun decorating the “good news” or “hooray” list for your family.

As you look at the list, take turns sharing how an item on the list causes joy for you. Also, share how God gets credit for the item on the list and why it is good news. As you reflect on the list, notice if there are items that God used others to cause that item to bring you joy. Consider how you can celebrate God and that person’s impact of bringing you joy by sharing the good news. Write a note, place a phone call, or make some other connection.

Week 4

Love

DECEMBER 20-26

Week 4

– INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE –

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 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.”

John 3:16-17

“Could it be true, this Bethlehem story of a Creator descending to be born on one small planet? If so, it is a story like no other. Never again need we wonder whether what happens on this dirty little tennis ball of a planet matters to the rest of the universe. Little wonder a choir of angels broke out in spontaneous song, disturbing not only a few shepherds but the entire universe.”

Philip Yancey

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

Matthew 1:18-21, 24-25

God Saves

The 20th century theologian A.W. Tozer says, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. “ Whether you agree with Tozer or not, it is certainly true that what we think about God impacts our lives in numerous ways both obvious and subtle.

When the coming birth of Jesus was announced to Joseph, God gave us a beautiful picture of what he is like. Matthew’s gospel tells us that an angel came to Joseph and told him that Mary was going to bear a child, and the child’s name was to be Jesus.

In our culture, names are not always significant. Some of us are named after a relative or a hero of our parents, but very few of us think very often about what our name means. This was not the case in the world Jesus was born into. Names were everything. Names were representations of your identity and character, and children were often given names in hopes that they would live up to their meaning. The name “Jesus” literally means “God saves.” So, the angel told Joseph, “He will save his people from their sins.”

Throughout the Scriptures, God’s love is always tied to God’s action. In the Old Testament when God was telling Israel of his love for them he would often remind them that he had “brought them out of slavery in Egypt.” This was God’s way of reminding his people that they could trust him because he had demonstrated his love and faithfulness. God has never asked us to simply trust him when he says he loves us. He has always given us tangible evidence of that love.

Love Shows Up

So many of us have been hurt by people who said they loved us, but failed to show it. In the Christmas story, God is showing his love. At Christmas, God left his heavenly throne and came to us. He, the one who knows every star by name, draped himself in humanity as a child. A child with the name that says it all: Jesus, God saves.

This is perhaps the clearest picture God could give us as his love. He didn’t simply declare it from afar; he came to us, up close and personal. He lived among us, entered our brokenness, and showed us that a better way is possible. We live in a mysterious world, and there is much we can wonder about, but the Christmas story shows us we need not wonder about God’s love. He has come to save us.

So, this ultimate treasure of God’s love in action is not hidden. It is proclaimed to all the world. The greatest moments in history are still celebrated today...Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection. Everyone can and should know this triumphant truth. This great treasure is not just a fact for us to figure but it is a reality we can know intimately in relationship with God and His family...the Church.

This self-giving, tangible love that we are called to not only receive, but also embody. We are invited to be the face and voice and hands and feet of our King for a world that so desperately needs a touch of the Father’s love. Our responsibility is to represent him. We are invited to participate in the work of Jesus who came, “not to condemn the world but to save the world”. So, in this season may we be living examples of God’s saving love, and may we do so with the great joy that only comes from knowing our King has come for us!

Reflection

What comes into your mind when you think about God? What does that say about you and the way you think about Him?

Who is someone you know who does a great job of embodying the love of the Father? What is something you can learn from them to apply to your own life?

God hasn't just said that He loves us, he has demonstrated His love through His actions. Why is that significant?

Response

Think of some ways God has demonstrated his love through his actions (either for you personally or for humanity as a whole). Spend some time thanking God for his tangible love!

What is one simple way that you, as God's ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20), can practically and sacrificially show love through action to someone who needs a touch of God's love this week? Who is the someone you can show and tell the love of Jesus to this week?

Songs of the Season

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Angels We Have Heard on High

Week 4

– FAMILY EXPERIENCE –

Set aside 10-20 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

Matthew 2:1-2

The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three wise men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the king God had promised David all those years before. But this child was a new kind of kings. Though he was the Prince of Heaven, he had become poor. Though he was the Mighty God, he had become a helpless baby. This King hadn't come to be the boss. He had come to be a servant.

Jesus Storybook Bible (The King of All Kings)

If time allows, read the entire story The King of All Kings.

And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and 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.

Matthew 2:9-11

Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

The first people to hear of Jesus' birth, were not royalty or the most powerful people in Bethlehem. In a field outside of town, God unleashed His angels to display the most amazing birth announcement the world has ever seen, to a group of humble shepherds. God's rescue was meant for all people!

On the very same night, God used a bright, blazing star to announce the birth of Jesus. This special star was seen in a land far, far away, more than likely, modern day Iran, by a group of educated men who studied the stars. These Magi were no ordinary men. God had been declaring His promise to send a Rescuer to the Israelites throughout Scriptures. These Wise Men were considered Gentiles, which means they were not descendants of Abraham and more than likely did not know God. But God knew them and it had been His merciful plan all along to offer salvation to the people of every nation. His bright star beaming in the night sky was a display of spectacular grace and mercy to all people.

Ask: Have you ever seen or heard about something that made you want to learn more?

The Wise Men were drawn from their home and set out on a journey that would take them up to two years to reach Jesus. They did not meet Jesus in the stable He was born in, but they traveled long and didn't give up until they found him living with Mary and Joseph. When they saw toddler Jesus, they bowed down and worshipped Him, the Savior who had come to save them from their sins. They also gave Jesus extravagant gifts.

We see in the birth of Jesus that God goes to great lengths to display the Good News that Jesus has come to rescue creation from their sin. His gift of love is meant for ALL tribes, Every tongue, every nation. His desire is for all people to know Him, His love, His grace and His Forgiveness. One day, God promises, the knee of every man, woman and child will worship Him.

Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to praise God and to pray that nations of people will come to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin.

Song

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

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

*Sing choirs of angels sing in exultation
sing all ye citizens of heaven above;
glory to God in the highest:
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.
Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

Family Activity

Spend time this week looking at a map or a globe. Blindfold each child and have them place their finger on a country. Talk about what it would look like to live in that country, in a different culture. Share about countries that do not allow people to worship Jesus. As a family, be intentional about praying for those nations, as well as the country you found earlier.

Christmas Eve

– FAMILY EXPERIENCE –

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

Lighting of the Advent Candle

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

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

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

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

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

Luke 1:1-20

Song

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

*Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child
Holy infant, so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace*

*Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!*

*Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.*

*Silent night, holy night
Wondrous star lend thy light
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!*

Prayer

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

Appendix A

– THE ADVENT INVITATION –

The Advent season is like no other in terms of openness to hear the story of Jesus. We can sometimes depend on a church program or event what we can participate in as individuals and families as ambassadors of Jesus. If we are not careful, we can drift into “doing church” instead of being the church. This season, we can be the church in our neighborhoods and community. We have the privilege of helping those who are far from God find joy in Jesus this season. Let’s not miss this opportunity. It only takes a willingness to be used by God along with simple, intentional steps to open up our schedule for a moment through The Advent Invitation.

Our Advent Invitation is God’s invitation to us to be on mission with Him by declaring the “good news of great joy for all the world.” We all have neighbors, extended family, co-workers, and friends who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They might know the facts of the Christmas story but not know the joy and freedom of a connecting with the One who came into our time and space to save us.

The Advent Invitation is designed to be a simple concept by making time in your home to relate with others, relax, share a meal, and connect. Even better, you are encouraged to come together with your small group, ministry team, or other Christ-followers to throw a party for The Advent Invitation.

In Luke 5:27-32, Matthew, a tax collector, decided to follow Jesus. And upon making this exciting decision, the first thing he did, was to throw a big feast (or party) and invite all of his other friends who were also tax collectors over to his house. So, with that same heart, you can think of The Advent Invitation as a “Matthew Party”. A get-together (or party) with the purpose of getting to know those around you, and in love, introducing them to Jesus. The invitation list should consist of both people that are still far from God, as well as a few Christ-followers.

Then, whether as a individual, nuclear family, or partnering with others, use one of the Advent Guide devotions or family experiences as your outline for the evening along with food and conversation.

Here are some other tips as you plan The Advent Invitation:

- Put a time on your calendar now. What gets scheduled gets done and the sooner you put it on the calendar the sooner you will begin to make the invitations to others along with other planning other details.
- If there will be children at the gathering, read through the current week’s Family Experience and decide how to best use the ideas in this experience for a fun evening as you share the story of Jesus.
- Have good food.
- Another simple idea, is to have a Happy Birthday Jesus party including a cake and candles, singing happy birthday, and read stories in Scripture that tell about the birth of Jesus.
- Combine other fun things you typically do during this Christmas season as you gather with others: movies, games, etc.
- A great next step from your Advent Invitation, is to invite friends and family to Bridgeway’s Christmas Eve services. Service times are 1:00pm, 2:30pm, 4:00pm and 5:30pm.

Appendix B

– ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES –

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

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

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

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

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

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

Activities to help you create intentional **time**:

- Make a set of Christmas ornaments to remind you of the prophecies of Jesus’ birth and their fulfillments.
- Spend time imagining what the “glory of the Lord” shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props, and loud singing.
- Make a Christmas card for someone who does not love and trust Jesus. Wish them a merry Christmas and tell them that Jesus came to save sinners!
- Consider a way your family can serve in the community during the Advent season. Here are a few ideas:
 - Adopting an angel and shopping for them together.
 - Visiting an elderly care center and singing carols for the residents.
 - Serving a meal at a homeless assistance shelter.
 - Taking dinner to someone you know who is lonely or in need.
- Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus’ birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.
- Play hide-and-seek and talk about how Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Thank God for sending Jesus.

Ideas for capturing teachable **moments**:

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

Ways to recognize and remember **milestones**:

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

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

Appendix C

– ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES FOR STUDY & REFLECTION –

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

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

Isaiah 11:1-5

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”
(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Matthew 1:18-25

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

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5; 14

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

Colossians 1:15–22

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

Philippians 2:1–11

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 1:1–4

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

Revelation 21:1-5

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Revelation 22:17

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:20

Appendix D

– RECOMMENDED RESOURCES –

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

Behold the Lamb of God

ANDREW PETERSON

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

Christmas Songs, Headed Home, Comfort and Joy, Glad Tidings

FOLK ANGEL

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

Treasuring Christ in our Traditions

NOEL PIPER

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

The Advent Book

JACK AND KATHY STOCKMAN

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

Messiah

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

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

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas

EDITED BY NANCY GUTHRIE

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

Songs for Christmas, Silver and Gold

SUFJAN STEVENS

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