

Joy

ADVENT 2021

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DECEMBER 12- 18

# Introduction

The Advent season is a four week period before Christmas that celebrates the anticipation and coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The origin of "advent" is from the Latin word *adventus* which simply translates "coming" or "arrival". Not only is the Christian meaning for preparation and celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ, His birth at Christmas, but also to celebrate the new life when someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior, and lastly, the anticipation of Jesus returning again.



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# The Four Weeks of Advent

The four Sundays of Advent each have a specific theme or focus. The purpose of each theme is to spend time reflecting on the true meaning of the season - the life of Jesus Christ. The goal should be to come before God with a sincere heart and to worship Jesus Christ. To help the observation of these weeks, many churches led their congregation through Advent Readings. This tradition includes the reading of Scriptures that reflect the theme of each week. Whether in a traditional church or at home with your family, these Bible verses are a great way to reflect on the promise of the Messiah both yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

## Week 1: Hope

***Isaiah 9:2, 6-7:***

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

## Week 2: Preparation

***Isaiah 40:3-5:***

“A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”

## Week 3: Joy

***Matthew 2:10-11:***

“When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

## Week 4: Love

***John 3:16-19:***

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”

DECEMBER 12

## The Business Of Exceeding Expectations

God isn't in the business of meeting expectations. He's in the business of blowing them out of the water. Jesus is an incredible example of God's exceeding goodness. Through Jesus, God met needs the Jewish people didn't even realize they had. He provided much more than the fleeting prosperity of an earthly kingdom. He established His eternal kingdom, provided salvation, reconciled humans to right relationship with God, and brought hope to a broken world.

How often do we place our expectations on God, assuming He'll work according to our timeline and plan? This habit isn't great for our faith because God rarely moves on our schedule, and His answers rarely match what we envision.

We need to understand the difference between placing our expectations on God versus trusting in His plan and being expectant that He will see it through to completion in our lives. Placing our expectations on God can set us up for disappointment, frustration, and resentment when they go unmet, but having a healthy expectancy of God can feed our faith.

This Christmas, find comfort in knowing that God wants to do more than meet your expectations. He wants to exceed them. Take heart in the fact that God can do far more than we can even think to ask of Him. Expect God to move, trust His process, and watch your faith grow.

**Prayer:** Father, thank You for the reminder I have in Jesus that You are graciously meeting needs I don't even know I have. This Christmas, I pray for confidence in what I hope for but cannot see yet. Help my faith in Your faithfulness increase. Thank You for being the God who exceeds expectations. Your timing is perfect, and Your plan is best. Have Your way in my life!

DECEMBER 13

## Be Faithful In The Small Things

God loves to operate differently from the world's perspective. He doesn't honor people for the same reasons the world honors them. He values faithfulness over fame and humility over power.

If you are feeling unimportant or overlooked today, don't stop investing in what God has given you to do. Even if you feel your task is small, give it everything you've got. Don't be discouraged! God is looking for people who will be faithful with little so that He can entrust them with more. Whatever you've been assigned to do today, do it with all your might. God sees your diligence and rewards those who faithfully complete the task in front of them.

**Prayer:** Father, thank You for placing value on what the world seems to overlook. No matter what task You give me, I commit to working at it with all my heart. Help me not to get discouraged by worldly standards, but instead remember how You chose the humble, hardworking shepherds to be the first to know about the miracle of Christmas. Like the shepherds, thank You for choosing me to be a carrier of Your Good News. And thank You in advance for giving me more as I'm faithful with what You've entrusted to me.



DECEMBER 14

## The Amazing Were Amazed

Angels probably appear worthy of worship in their own right. They're so different from anything we see here on earth, reflecting the light of heaven, and commanding full attention and respect. But they are not the focus of worship. As remarkable as they were, the angels focused completely on praising God for who He is and what He would bring to earth through Jesus. Angels, amazing in the eyes of humans, were amazed by the sight of God. It must have been that much more convincing to the shepherds that God was worthy of their highest worship and praise.

***Prayer:*** Father, I can't fully grasp how awesome You are. During this Christmas season, keep my eyes focused on how worthy You are of my worship. Never let me lose the wonder of Your greatness. Everything in heaven and on earth was made to worship You. No one comes close to how glorious You are.

DECEMBER 15

## Faith Without Hesitation

Think of a time when you heard from God, whether it was a promise, a confirmation, or a conviction. What was your immediate response? Did you act on what He said, or did you sit and ponder whether it was really His voice? Maybe you were sure you heard what He said but still hesitated. (Disclaimer: It's okay—we've all done it!)

Instead of waiting around and letting doubt creep in, they responded immediately. This took great faith! Certainly, they wanted to meet Jesus, but they also had earthly concerns. What would they do with their flock? Should they tell their families first? Were they dressed appropriately? Were simple shepherds really worthy of meeting the King of Kings? They didn't let any of the questions we might have asked in the same situation keep them from quickly responding to God.

As we follow Jesus, we need to embrace this kind of faith. When we hesitate with God, we create a breeding ground for doubt, fear, and insecurity—none of which come from Him. When you hear a specific word from Him, trust His direction. He will equip you to do what He's asked you to do. All you need to do is respond. Stir your faith today and decide in advance that you'll move when God's says to move, no matter what!

**Prayer:** Father, thank You for Your patience with me. Forgive me for the times I've hesitated when You have spoken to me. I want to follow Your plan for my life. Strengthen my faith, and help me to respond quickly when I hear from You.



DECEMBER 16

## Store It Up

There's a moment in the midst of the busyness of the Christmas night when the Bible notes that we store up things for a reason. There comes a time when we need to turn to the supply we've saved to sustain us when we're in need. Knowing the prophecies about the Messiah's sacrifice, Mary would have been aware that her precious child would one day experience incredible suffering. When she stood at the foot of the cross as her Son was crucified, Mary must have had to rehearse every memory she had of God's faithfulness so she could continue believing in the promise of Jesus' resurrection. In her greatest moment of pain, she had a collection of proof that God would do what He promised.

When we experience "mountain top" seasons of seeing God's faithfulness, we need to store up the truth of our experience and save it for later. In John 16:33, Jesus makes it clear that, "In this world [we] will have trouble." But He tells us to take heart, because He has overcome the world. In the hardest moments of our lives, we need to remember the victory of Jesus and recall all the ways we've seen His goodness. When you experience God's faithfulness in your life, take a step back and store it up as treasure in your heart. Think of it often. When your toughest days come, like Mary, you will be able to endure.

**Prayer:** Father, I praise You because You're faithful. I have seen it with my own eyes, and I don't want to forget it. Help me intentionally store up the moments when I see You fulfill Your promises so that when difficulty comes, my faith will remain strong.

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DECEMBER 17

## The Wait Is Worth It

Imagine the overwhelming experience of holding the physical representation of God's faithfulness in your arms. Luke recorded that Simeon took Jesus in his arms "and praised God." We don't know if Simeon cried or danced, but if you put yourself in his shoes, your response would probably be like his. No other reaction would be as appropriate as praise!

Don't lose heart if you've been holding on to a promise from God for what seems like forever. He is faithful, and His timing is perfect. Whether your promise is fulfilled in a matter of weeks or after a lifetime of trust, the outcome is worth the wait.

***Prayer:*** Father, I praise You because You are faithful! I know that You are trustworthy and Your promises to me are true. I will not give up believing in Your promises, and I wait in anticipation for the day I see them fulfilled. I know Your timing is perfect. I will remain faithful to You as I wait, and I praise You in advance for the fulfillment of Your promises!

DECEMBER 18

## God's Heart For The Whole World

For centuries, people assumed the Savior would come specifically to deliver the Jews, God's chosen people. It's a reasonable assumption because they were constantly persecuted by surrounding Gentile nations who worshiped false gods. If the One True God was coming to earth to establish His eternal Kingdom, surely it was for the sake of the Jews.

But when God revealed the significance of Jesus' birth to the Magi, they received their first tangible glimpse of His desire to reconcile with the entire world, no matter our background or depth of depravity. This is an important moment, especially for those who are not of Jewish descent. While Jesus was born with a pure Jewish lineage and certainly came to redeem the ones He'd chosen from the start, He also came to bring all people back into a relationship with their Creator.

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank You for coming to save a world that disowned You for so long. Thank You for wanting a relationship with me when I was completely unrighteous and separated from You. I know You love the entire world, and I want to be Your hands and feet continuing to reach out to those far from You. Use me to carry Your love to the nations.



Joy







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