

2022

Advent



Celebrating Advent

Advent is the beginning of our church year

Advent celebrates the coming of Christ - both his coming as a baby at Christmas and also his second coming in the future. It is a period of waiting and preparation. It has been a period of reflection for the church since before A.D. 380.

For a lot of people, Advent means calendars filled with little chocolates that help count down the days until Santa comes to drop off his presents. Although, now you can find Advent calendars for all sorts of things that have nothing to do with the Biblical story or the four week liturgical season of the church.

As Christians, we know that while these may be flashy, fun, and attractive, what we are really counting down to is the birth of Christ, not the visit of Santa. We know that these four weeks are spent in active waiting and preparation for Christ's coming to earth, both as a baby 2,000 years ago and his promised return someday in the future.

There's nothing wrong with a bit of daily chocolate! But we should remember to keep the right story at the center of our countdown and the center of our excitement. Even if the longed for items don't appear underneath the tree, God is still King and he's coming back as he promised.



Chocolate Advent calendars count down the day until Santa comes to visit

Sharing the excitement of Advent

This month our prayer focus is on those who do not know Christ. Our Monthly Prayer Calendar has several ways to pray for those you come into contact with who need to know the saving message of the Gospel. As we go through these four weeks of Advent keep your Monthly Prayer Calendar close by to be used in your prayer time.

It can be as simple as sharing the differences in how and why we use Advent calendars. We can explain that instead of counting down to Santa we count down to the birth of Christ. We spend these four weeks before Christmas preparing not just our homes but also our hearts. As the hymn says “And every heart, prepares Him room...”

During this season we prepare not just individually but also corporately. We wait together, hope together, seek peace together, rejoice together, love together, and worship together. Advent is not a solitary season, it is a season of togetherness. We as believers need each other - we were made to be a community. Those who do not know Christ also need friendship and

community, especially those friends that will point them to life everlasting.

Dear Heavenly Father, I know it is not an accident you have allowed (name of person) to be in my life at this season. I pray I will love him/her as you love him/her. I pray my thoughts, words, and actions towards (name) will be the same as Yours toward me. I pray for the courage and readiness of Philip when he found himself at the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot. Please help me to journey alongside (name), I pray that I will be available to meet him/her where he/she is at. And where I fail, I ask Your forgiveness and the ability to humbly reconcile with (name). I ask your blessing on each encounter we have. In your precious name I pray, Amen.





Light an advent wreath during Advent as you read and discuss Scripture together



Put together a Jesus Tree to trace the Scriptures that foretell of Christ's birth



Listen to Advent/Christmas songs. Use one of the playlists available on the church Spotify (FBC-Waterford) or make your own playlist of favorites. Click on the links below to go straight to the playlists.

Week 1: Hope

Week 2: Peace

Week 3: Joy

Week 4: Love

Christmas

Advent Prayer Bags

These Advent prayer bags can be used to help children participate in the Advent readings. It's helpful to have something tangible to hold and use as they work through the big ideas in this Advent devotional. You can make one bag for the family or one bag for each child - either works!

You'll need:

1. A bag to hold the items.
2. A tea light (a traditional one or a battery operated one).
3. Felt or paper to cut out a heart shape and a star shape.
4. A pipe cleaner.
5. A rock you can paint or draw on. You will paint the baby Jesus on the rock (like the picture to the right).
6. White, brown, and black sharpies or paint to draw on the rock (mod podge or varnish to seal the painted stone is optional).

How to use:

1. The tea light is for Week 1: Hope. Light it each day during the first week as you talk about hope. What do you hope for? How can we have hope? Why do we have hope at Advent?
2. The star is for Week 2: Peace. Hold the star each day when you talk about peace. The star led the wise men to the baby Jesus who was the promised Prince of Peace. What does peace feel like? What brings us peace?
3. The pipe cleaner is for Week 3: Joy. When you talk about joy each day during the third week, shape the pipe cleaner



into something that brings you joy. Why does this thing/person bring you joy? How does that feel? What is one thing today that brought you joy?

4. The heart is for Week 4: Love. Hold the heart each day when you talk about love. Talk about the people you love. How do you show them that you love them? How do you know that they love you? How do you know that Jesus loves you?
5. The Baby Jesus rock and the tea light are for Christmas Day. Make a bed for the Baby Jesus rock to sit in and light the tea light. Thank God for sending Jesus to earth, for sending light in the darkness. Ask for help being a light in this world for God.

Adapted from <http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/2017/12/advent-prayer-bags.html>

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Hope at Advent

The Christmas season in general is a season of hope. There is a lot of hope regarding the people we will get to spend time with, the places we will go, the food we will eat, and the presents. There is also hope that we will stay within the budget this year, everyone will get along, and the holiday will go smoothly. And yet, with all this focus on Christmas Advent is still a funny season for many of us. There are no movies about it, no commercials, no specific items we buy in a store that scream “ADVENT”. It is easy to forget in the craziness of the commercial Christmas season. In addition to the commercials, movies, and things to buy there are school events, work events, family events, friend events, church events, town events... whew! And somewhere in all the hullabaloo we are supposed to maintain our hope.

Not just our hope for a nap, a good cup of coffee, a great sale, or family peace (all legitimate hopes) but real soul-piercing hope that Christ is coming back as he promised. We have to maintain the hope that God’s kingdom, which broke into our world when Christ came the first time 2,000 year ago is still here and he is at work transforming us and the world. And sometimes we don’t feel that hope. We know we should have it but the pit of our stomachs says something else.

So how do we maintain hope when the world around us feels like a roller coaster we never wanted to be on in the first place?

WEEK 1: HOPE

At first glance, Matthew 24: 36-44 doesn't seem to offer much hope. It can feel kind of scary even. But Matthew is giving us the key to hope here, even if he doesn't label it as such. We are too busy ourselves with being prepared for his coming. If we are focused on what we need to do to be ready then we are not focused on all the other things that are not related to the task of being ready.

Part of Advent is waiting for Christ's second coming. We wait for him to return and usher in the new heaven and new earth. He promised this would happen and yet he left no indication of when this would happen. This was not an oversight, but intentional. So we are to be ready at all times. We are to live our lives in expectation that this can happen at any time. Not in a fearful or anxious way, but in a hopeful and joyful way. Our Lord, our Savior, could be here with us at any time! This means we don't procrastinate when it comes to following his commands, to reconciling with God and others, to repentance and forgiveness. We can't plan to get ready in the final moments, because we never know when those will be.

Have we put the same amount of time and energy into preparing ourselves for Christ's return as we have for Christmas? Have we paid as much attention to his commands as we have our present budget? Do we focus on reconciliation with God and others the same way we do on the details of Christmas dinner?

Waiting in Hope...

Living with this hope of His return makes the Advent season special every year. We are reminded that waiting is not passive, but requires certain actions from us.

Readings for Week 1: HOPE

Sunday, November 27:

Matthew 24:36-44

Monday, November 28:

Romans 13:11-14

Tuesday, November 29:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Wednesday, November 30:

Matthew 25:1-13

Thursday, December 1:

2 Peter 3:1-10

Friday, December 2:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Saturday, December 3:

Psalm 117



Thoughts for Week 1: HOPE

1. How do we prepare for different events in our life:
 - a sleepover
 - when you know it will rain later in the day
 - for a big test next week
 - a pop quiz
2. How do we prepare for things that we hope will happen but we don't have any details (when, how will it happen, steps you need to take, etc.)?
3. How do you keep your hope when you don't know when something will happen?
4. How do we prepare for Advent? How do we prepare for Christmas?
5. Many of us spend a lot of time and energy preparing to celebrate Christmas but Matthew 24:36-44 challenges us to be prepared in a different way. How do we prepare ourselves and each other to be ready for Christ to come back?
6. What is one thing we can practice this Advent season to help us be better prepared for Christ?



Peace at Advent

Peace. We pray for it all the time. We work for it, we beg for it from squabbling children and relatives. And we long for uninterrupted moments of quiet, unbroken, luxurious peace. And once in a while it happens. The kids play nicely, the relatives play nicely, the phone and email stay silent for a little while, there's a day when the mail doesn't contain bills, everything at work seems to be going as it should, and your coffee is the right temperature. But then it's over and you're back to reaching for some aspirin. There has to be more to peace than just those fleeting moments, right?

The peace that Christ wants to give us is more enduring, more all-encompassing than just the temporary cease fire in your living room. The peace Christ brings is not just a simple quiet and unbothered moment. It is the turning away from our fears and anxiety and trusting God to transform the world. Read that sentence again. It's easier said than done, right? If it were easy then we would all already be at peace! We hold on to our fears and anxieties for different reasons. We may believe that it's our job to solve specific problems, we may not trust others (even God, if we are truly honest) to solve these problems, or we may have been holding on to them for so long that we don't know if we can let go. The words of Paul resonate loud and clear here: "For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate." (Romans 7:15). So this season, we need to practice peace. Instead of a quiet moment, peace is an action.

This is why Jesus says "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). We need people to remind us that peace is not a zen state of mind but an action we must take. Peacemakers remind us God is still at work and we need to get moving on what He has called us to do.

WEEK 2: PEACE

John the Baptist was a peacemaker. Yes, he wore camel hair, ate bugs, lived in the desert, and was kinda scruffy. He shouted at people to repent. Doesn't fit with the world's idea of peaceful, does it? But he spent his life reminding everyone that they needed to repent. They needed to turn from fear, anxiety, greed, and sin in all forms and turn toward God. They needed to change their thinking and their behavior to reflect that they were God's people and not people who worshipped other gods. Repentance brings peace because it reconciles us with God. It reorients us to the right direction.

John preached with urgency because repentance and the peace that it brings are essential to being ready for Christ's return. Why would we leave it as an unchecked item on our to-do list when it carried such importance? How do you need to repent and reorient yourself toward God? How do we as a church need to repent and reorient toward God? How can we act as peacemakers in our world? How can you practice peace this season?

Waiting is a time to repent...

Repentance is what purifies us so that we can be filled with the presence of God. And only God can fill that emptiness of our hearts with His peace that passes all understanding.

Readings for Week 2: Peace

Sunday, December 4:

Matthew 3:1-12

Monday, December 5:

Psalm 25

Tuesday, December 6:

2 Peter 3:11-18

Wednesday, December 7:

Psalm 38

Thursday, December 8:

Psalm 32

Friday, December 9:

Isaiah 11:1-10

Saturday, December 10:

Romans 15:4-13



Thoughts for Week 2: PEACE

1. Who do you know in your life who acts as a peacemaker?
2. What kinds of things can you do in your life to act as a peacemaker?
3. Read Matthew 3:1-12. Why did John the Baptist preach that people had to repent in order to be prepared for Jesus to come? (Repent means to be sorry for what you have done wrong AND to change your feelings, thinking, and behavior to avoid doing it again).
4. What do you think repentance has to do with peace?
5. Pray together and repent of anything that prevents you from being ready for Christ to come. Talk about ways to help each other change your feelings, thinking, and behavior so that you can stop doing the things that keep you from being ready for Christ.



Joy at Advent

This is the season of searching for joy. In part because the days are cooler and darker so we need the lightness that joy brings. Another factor is that we are promised joy from those who sell Christmas decorations, presents, food, and all the accessories. We look for joy in the things that we buy and the events we attend. And we do get a certain joy from seeing people we don't see often, sharing meals, and buying presents for those we love. Those are all good things and they do give us joy. Juxtaposed with this is that this season can also be a season of heavy grieving and mourning for many. There are also those who live in fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and doubt - those things don't disappear during the Christmas season. Real joy can seem elusive.

John the Baptist, though he was a peacemaker and a man of God, had doubts and anxieties. John sat in jail wondering if Jesus really was the one who was promised to come. A crisis like sitting in jail gives someone a chance to replay all their doubts and fears. Had he been wrong about Jesus? He was expecting a Messiah who would exercise great power, and he expected that power to be wielded in the worldly sense. Jesus wasn't gathering any armies or destroying any Roman legions. John needed confirmation that Jesus was the right one. It's a confirmation many of us have asked for us as well. Are you real, Jesus?

Sometimes we wonder if we got it all wrong, if we didn't do it right. Sometimes we even begin to question if Jesus dying on the cross accomplished anything at all - because when we look at the world around us it doesn't seem like anything has gotten better. And we doubt because we have placed our trust in him but things are still hard, things still hurt. So Jesus, are you the one?

WEEK 3: JOY

Jesus responded to John's doubts with something more substantial than just a "yes". He said "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me." (Matthew 11:5-6). What Jesus said was that I am here caring for those who need it, just as the Messiah is supposed to do. In the darkest moments of our lives we seek help. And when we seek him we find him and he helps us. In his darkest moment John reached out to Jesus for reassurance and he got it! Jesus, the Messiah, was out in the world caring for the people. He was doing things an army could never accomplish.

Jesus did not scold John the Baptist for needing reassurance. Instead, he provided it. When we are in crises and dark places, we can also ask him for reassurance. We can take joy in a Messiah that walks with us!

Waiting with Joy...

As we wait in this season of Advent and as we wait for Christ to return, we can find joy. We know that Jesus is here to comfort us because he is the one, the promised Messiah. We know that he is Immanuel, God with us.

Readings for Week 3: JOY

Sunday, December 11:

Matthew 11:2-11

Monday, December 12:

Isaiah 9:1-7

Tuesday, December 13:

Psalm 146

Wednesday, December 14:

1 Peter 1:1-11

Thursday, December 15:

Psalm 63

Friday, December 16:

Luke 1:26-33

Saturday, December 17:

Psalm 66



Thoughts for Week 3: JOY

1. Read Matthew 11:2-11 and list all the reasons John had to rejoice even though he was in jail.
2. If we look carefully, we can see the ways that God is at work in our world today. What reasons do we have to rejoice?
3. How can you encourage someone to rejoice because of what God is doing in our world?
4. As you go about your school and work this week, make a list of all the times you see God at work in your life or the life of someone you know. Share them with each other over a meal or during prayer time.
5. In what ways have you been obedient to God so that he can use you to do his work this week?



Love at Advent

If you enjoy Hallmark-type Christmas movies, you know there are about five basic plots that are recycled and they all center on the theme of finding love at Christmas. In every case, love is a warm, fuzzy feeling and is touted as the true meaning of Christmas. The movies get it partially right. Love is at the center of why God sent his son to earth. Love is at the center of why God wants to repair the broken relationship between Himself and humanity. But romantic love, it doesn't happen the way the movies portray it. That may be the attraction though, right? Watching love be so easy and sure. We know the main characters will find love and it's nice to watch a happy ending. We like the assurance of a happy ending.

The original Christmas romance story was very un-Hollywood. Mary and Joseph are already betrothed when she tells Joseph she is pregnant, he knows that it is not his fault so he plans to quietly divorce her. That would have been a very unromantic story had Joseph not believed the angel who came to him in his dream and assured him that there had been no betrayal. But even more, this story illustrates that God chose a righteous man to be the earthly father of his son. And the love of a righteous man is beyond value.

Let's go behind the scenes to make sure we know what is going on in this passage. We often think of a betrothal as the engagement period before a legal marriage occurs. However, at this time in the Jewish culture, betrothal was a legal marriage and it was a period that lasted for about a year. In that year the husband and wife lived apart, remaining with their families as they prepared for their joined married life. That's why Joseph could consider divorcing Mary. He could not just break an engagement the way modern day couples can. Today, things are done the opposite way with many couples living together before they are legally married. But this understanding of first century Jewish betrothal also helps us understand why Joseph loved her so deeply that he did not wish to cause her pain even though he felt he had no choice but to divorce her. As a righteous man, he could not continue in this marriage believing she had been unfaithful to him and yet he was unwilling to make her vulnerable to punishment under the Jewish law by exposing what had happened. He wasn't worried about pride or honor, but about righteousness and love.

WEEK 4: LOVE

Joseph had to have been a man who knew God's voice to believe the angel who visited his dream. A lot of people may have dismissed the dream but he believed and obeyed. And even more than that, he loved. He continued to love and care for both Mary and Jesus. His love was so much more than warm fuzzy feelings. It was actions and trust. Jesus had the privilege of growing up with a man who knew what it meant to love in all circumstances. This is my favorite Christmas romance story!

As we read through this week's devotions, where do we see righteousness, trust, and love? How often do we factor righteousness into the way that we love? Do we provide our loved ones with enough trust to love well?

Waiting for love...

Love came down on Christmas in the form of the Christ child. It was also present in the form of the righteous love and trust of his earthly father. Love was truly all around. Love is not hard to find among those who seek to do God's will. Based off the examples we find in the Bible, do you love well?

Readings for Week 4: LOVE

Sunday, December 18:

Matthew 1:18-24

Monday, December 19:

Isaiah 42:1-12

Tuesday, December 20:

Isaiah 43:1-3

Wednesday, December 21:

1 John 4:7-12

Thursday, December 22:

Isaiah 11:1-9

Friday, December 23:

Psalm 8

Saturday, December 24:

John 3:16-21



Thoughts for Week 4: LOVE

1. What does it mean to trust someone? Why do we trust people we love and who love us?
2. Read Matthew 1: 18-24 and list all the ways you see love being acted out.
3. Why do you think Joseph was able to trust God when he was asked to do something without understanding the reasons why?
4. Is it easy to do something if you don't understand why you are being asked to do it?
5. How do we know when God is asking us to do something?
6. Is there something we need to do because God has asked us to do it, even if we don't fully understand it?



Glory to God in the highest heaven!

“It’s Christmas time, there’s no need to be afraid. At Christmas time, we let in light and we banish shade.” Those are the first lines of the song “Do they know it's Christmas?”. The famous song in 1984 was written to raise awareness and money for the Ethiopian famine. Royalties from the song still go towards charitable work in different countries in Africa. Those words were meant to inspire those of means to remember those who live without. It was meant to remind us that at Christmas time we look at our abundance and can choose to share. The song ends with the repetition of the phrase “Feed the world”. The heart behind the song is kind and sincere, it pleads with those who can to help prevent sickness and death.

While the song was focused on a specific problem in our world, some of the words ring very true for us in a different way. Because of Christmas we no longer need to fear, the darkness IS banished. But not because we chose to share our abundance (although God does ask us to do so). It is because on Christmas God sent his only son to earth. So that we who walked in darkness could see the great light. The true light, the pure light. Because Christ was born, lived a sinless life in obedience to God, and died on the cross as atonement for all our sins we can be forgiven when we repent and have life everlasting with God.

How amazing that we are so loved! The hymnodist’s words ring ever true, “O how marvelous! O how wonderful! And my song shall ever be; O how marvelous! O how wonderful! Is my Savior’s love for me!”

CHRISTMAS DAY

Today we rejoice because Christ is born! Heaven has come to earth. We tremble because of our sin but we can rejoice because of the hope that comes with Christ. Everything is in process of being set right again. How can we who know him do anything but rejoice and celebrate that he has been born?

In the flurry of activities and busyness today, make time to stop and remember: we celebrate today because of what the birth of the Son of God means. We don't need the world around us to be peaceful in order to experience the true and lasting peace of God. Christ is born and we are saved - Amen!

We live in joy while we wait

The world waited for the Savior to come and he has - that is cause for deep celebration! While we wait for his return we can keep hold of that joy because we know the depths of his love for us.

Reading for CHRISTMAS

Sunday, December 25:

Luke 2:1-20

