

Hey this is Andy. Your friendly neighborhood minister in charge of Grow Groups. In years past, I have asked people around SCC what is their favorite thing about Christmas. One person responded the 26th... when it is over. I chuckled and asked why do you say that? The person responded because Christmas does nothing to draw me closer to God. I mentioned that our family practiced Advent for that very reason. It is so easy to become incumbered by the gatherings, the presents, the food (don't get me wrong... I love the food), and well, just the busyness of it all that we miss an opportunity to draw closer to God.

Let's try something different this year! Let's take some time with family and friends each week leading up to Christmas to focus our thoughts and attention on the reason we celebrate. That is the first coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let's take time to celebrate not just the day of Christmas but the season of Advent.



So what is Advent?

So simply put Advent is a season when we remember the arrival of someone very important and most definitely worthy of note. That person is Jesus... Emmanuel... God with us.

In the season of Advent, we remember the first Advent/arrival of Jesus as we expectantly await His second Advent/arrival.



God knew we needed reminders... Humans are notoriously short memory beings... He has given us reminders like... the rainbow to remember God's promise that He would not destroy the earth by a flood again. The Passover Festival for the Jews was an annual reminder of the miraculous and awful night that God liberated the Israelites by sending the death angel to destroy the first born of the oppressive Egyptians. Other feasts and festivals from the Old Testament served as similar reminders.

In the New Testament, God gives us Baptism as a reminder of Christ's death-burial-resurrection that marks a point in our life where we identify with Christ by mimicking Him. That significant point in our lives serves as a reminder for us of the moment we entered into the saved community of God. The Lord's supper is a weekly reminder of the broken body and spilled blood of Christ in the redemptive act on the cross. I would add another... that is marriage... the symbolism of a Christ-centered marriage reminds us of the love for Christ and His Bride the Church.

Altars were built to commemorate momentous occasions to remember things that God had done for His people... The likes of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses built altars as directed by God. Joshua was another example of God commanding a leader to build an altar from stones taken from the middle of the Jordan River as the Israelites crossed into the promised land. Joshua and 12 representatives from the tribes did as God directed and built an altar after they passed through the Jordan River. Joshua also built an additional altar not directed by God. Joshua built the altar in the middle of the river— so this season let's follow Joshua's example of an addition of another reminder. I think it is certainly a good thing to do to regularly remember God in the flesh coming to dwell among us. It is something to celebrate, something to give thanks about, and in doing so, hopefully will help draw us closer to God this Christmas rather than waiting until December 26 for it all to be over.



Imagery in the wreath... My family has celebrated Advent together for many years. The first couple of years we did Advent as a family the girls were small. I really think the only thing they got out of that first year was that they wanted to blow out the candle at the end of our devotional.

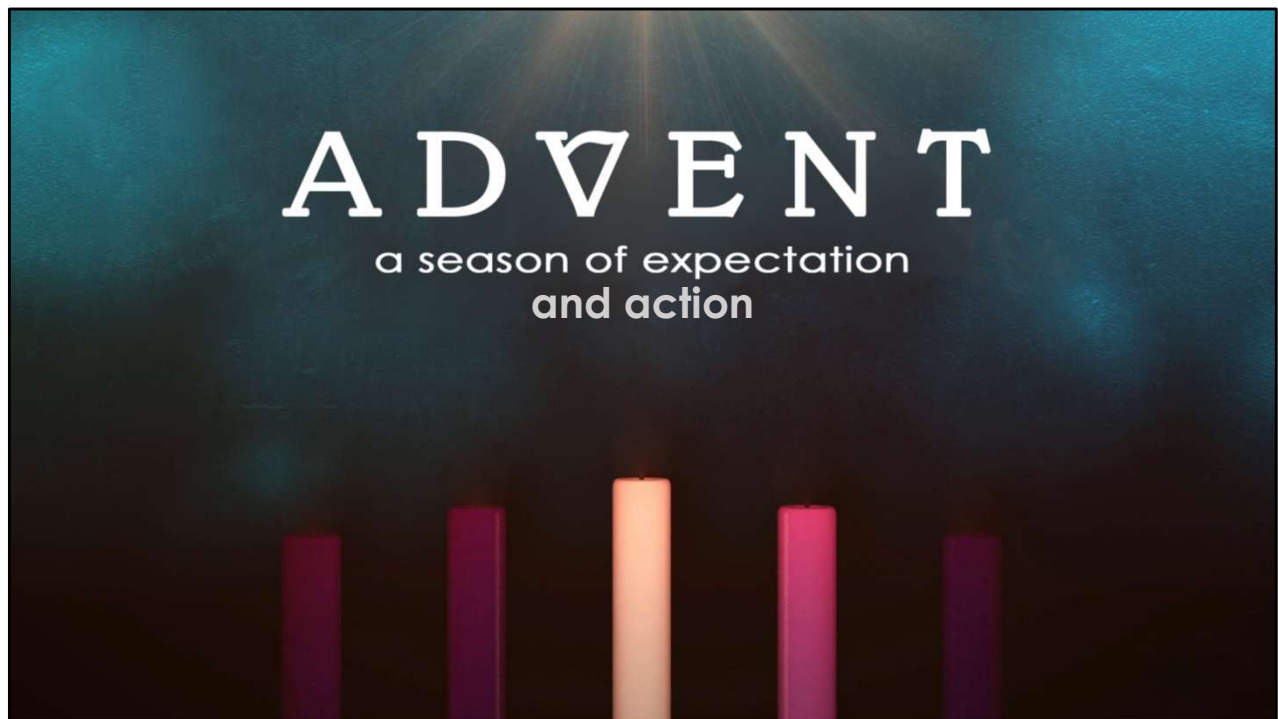
But that first year, I started out pointing elements of the traditional advent wreath that reminds us of God. I kept it simple and as they grew older we went deeper into the meaning of the Gospel.

Things like...

The wreath is traditionally made of branches from an evergreen tree... This reminds us of the eternal nature of God and the eternal life available to us now through the sacrifice of Jesus.

The wreath is also a circle which also reminds us that God is from everlasting to everlasting. We said that the red berries on the wreath reminded us of Jesus spilled blood on the cross. The next year THEY added that the prickles on the pinecones reminded us of the crown of thorns that Jesus wore on His head as He was mocked and crucified.

THEY WERE GETTING IT!



In addition to teaching the meaning of the elements of the wreath, on the first week we remind them that the candles are not lit... of course when they were little, darkness was scary, so it was a very vivid imagery.

Advent is a season of expectation. Expectation is an action... this is a season of expectation as we remember how expectant the Israelites were for the coming of the Messiah... their rescuer. The type of expectation we have during the season of Advent is not the type where we nervously twiddle our thumbs. No... in this expectation, we are reminded of the coming of Christ is connected with action. Through this study, we will look at some of the traditional words connected with each week of Advent and how they may not initially carry the thought of action. But when we look at it from a little different angle---- we will see being expectant is connected with action.