ADVENT

A SEASON OF GREAT EXPECTATION!

WEEKS 1-5

WEEK 1

WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen and the audio is at a comfortable level.

READ

Take some time in advance to read and consider the Bible study questions and come up with personal examples to encourage discussion.

DISCUSS

We hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of amazing discussion.

BIG IDEA

This Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of hope. In fact, the whole season of advent is about hope, the hope of Israel that God will make good on His promises. We look back to, for example, the prophecies and promises of the book of Isaiah that say that a child is going to be born who will then become the Prince of Peace and bring peace to a needy world. In this season, we are reminded of a popular Advent hymn: "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus":

Come thou long expected Jesus
born to set Thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth Thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

As we sing that hymn in the Advent season, we are reminded of Mary's Magnificat, sometimes called "Mary's Song of Praise." Here we have Mary, the mother of Jesus, who's just found out that she's with child in a miraculous way.

NOTES

This song is not just about Mary. In those first few verses, she reflects on the great things God has done for this nobody in a world full of powerful men. At the same time, six of the nine hymn verses are about what God will do through this child for the whole world. God will turn upside down the injustices she and many people around her have experienced.

One of the keywords that Mary uses in the song of praise is mercy. God is merciful, compassionate, and caring. You see, in Mary's world, the gods of the nations were not known to be compassionate and merciful. But Mary remembers the tenderhearted nature of her God.

When we sing Mary's song with her today, we're not just looking back on what God has already done in the past. That's part of it; that's part of the hope we sing about at this time of year. It's also about singing this song with hope about what God is still doing in His world.

(Taken from Bible.com *Great Expectations* Devotional)

Passages we'll review:

Luke 1:46-55; Isaiah 55:8-9; Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 9:2

NOTES

OPENING

What stood out to you from the message this week? What led you to really think? Did anything challenge you?

What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

Are you familiar with Advent? Did you celebrate Advent growing up? Do you celebrate it now?

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NOTES

READ*

Proverbs 13:12 says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” (NIV) Describe a time when your hope was deferred. What did God teach you through that experience?

Read Isaiah 55:8-9

How do you respond when things don’t go according to your plan? Be honest!

(Open for Discussion)

Even though we are made in the image of God, we are not exactly like Him. We can only see things in our limited scope, but God sees the whole picture! He knows all things. As our Father, He sees and understands things we can’t.

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In what ways has God worked unexpectedly in your life? How has this encouraged you?

(Open for Discussion)

The time between when the Old Testament ends and the New Testament begins is called the Intertestamental Period, a four hundred-year time span when God seemed silent. The people depended on prophets to hear from God, but between Malachi and John the Baptist, there was no prophet speaking to Israel.

NOTES

Read Deuteronomy 31:6

During Advent, we remember how God's people waited for the promise of the coming Messiah. When have you experienced a long season of waiting? What emotions did you feel during that time Anticipation? Impatience?

(Open for Discussion)

Were you afraid of the dark as a child? If so, can you remember how being in the dark made you feel?

(Open for Discussion)

NOTES

Read Isaiah 9:2

How does this verse give hope to God's people?

(The people of God weren't strangers to the darkness. After not hearing from God for four hundred years, the Israelites experienced a lot of confusion and uncertainty. They were in need of hope, and the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, spoken hundreds of years earlier, could bring them just that. Isaiah had knowledge of a great Light who would be coming.)

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Just as God used ordinary, imperfect people to bring Jesus into the world, He can use ordinary, imperfect people like us to bring the hope of Jesus to others.

PRAY

We have the privilege of knowing the full story. We know the promised Messiah came to earth, He died for the sins of the world and He is risen, conquering death and darkness, pain, doubt, and fear. He is our "thrill of hope." He is the reason this "weary world rejoices."

As you close in prayer, ask God to prepare your heart for the season of Advent. Pray for those who are in a painful season of waiting, that God would renew their hope and faith in Him.

*(Material taken from *Advent: The Weary World Rejoices* by Lifeway Women)

NOTES

WEEK 2

WATCH

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READ

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DISCUSS

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BIG IDEA

This Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of peace. And one of the reasons we celebrate peace is because of the marvelous words said by the angels at the time of the birth of Jesus, in Luke 2:14: "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

During Advent, we celebrate the expectation of peace that comes through Jesus the Messiah. And this is a time in history when we have so much expectation for peace because of the tragedies in our world. There are wars around the globe between nations. There are even wars within nations, within political parties.

We have battles that are taking place between the Church and the state and between one group of Christians and another group of Christians. We have strife and tension within individual churches, where some Christians are not getting along. And as they celebrate Advent and begin to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, both in His first Advent and His second Advent, that tension will become to them more obvious and maybe an opportunity for them to make peace.

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There are tensions and strife within families, neighborhoods, and within communities. Christians during Advent celebrate the peace that comes through the Messiah. Christians have the opportunity, so it seems to me, to be agents of peace in their families, in their communities, in their neighborhoods, in their churches, in their nations, and agents of peace for the whole world.

Our expectation for peace that we celebrate at Advent leads us to think about Jesus as the Prince of Peace. That celebration of the angels when Jesus was born expressed expectations, promises, and hopes from the book of Isaiah.

Peace is not an alternative or a preference for Christians today. Peace should be at the heart of the way we live, the way we talk, and what we preach.

(Taken from Bible.com *Great Expectations* Devotional)

Passages we'll review:

Matthew 5:9; Luke 19:42; Luke 2:13-14;
Romans 5:1; John 14:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:16

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OPENING

What stood out to you from the message this week? What led you to really think? Did anything challenge you?

What do you think of when you hear the word peace? A lack of conflict, chaos, and confusion? A feeling of serenity or stillness?

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READ*

We live in a world fraught with tragedy. Do you think it's even possible to have peace in this day and age, when things seem so out of control?

(Open for discussion)

Peace seems to be what everyone is seeking but few find. Often, we think of peace as a cease from striving, a stillness or a quiet. But true peace - the kind that will be sustained for all of eternity - is far better than even the best stillness in a chaotic season. In the beginning, there was peace. Peace wasn't equated with stillness, but with nearness to God!

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Have you found yourself holding your breath through hard seasons without peace? How would your circumstances or day-to-day living look different if you were experiencing the peace of God?

(Open for Discussion)

Read Luke 2:13-14

God promised peace to His people throughout the pages of Scripture, so it's important for us to return to God's word and remind ourselves of this promise.

Read Romans 5:1

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Paul described how Christ's coming brings us peace. How does the truth of Romans 5:1 bring you peace, even in hard circumstances?

(Open for Discussion)

What freedom do you find in remembering you have been declared righteous through Jesus?

(Open for Discussion)

<u>Read John 14:27</u>

What gift did Jesus promise His disciples?

(Peace)

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Jesus has given us His peace. “My peace I give to you.” It’s miraculous and mysterious but I believe He desired it to be oh-so-practical too. His peace is not something we have to hope for or try to attain. It’s his gift to us and the fruit of His Spirit living inside of us. When we trust Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and receive the Holy Spirit, one of the manifestations of the Spirit in us is peace (Gal. 5:22-23).

In what ways are you experiencing the absence of God’s gift of peace today?

(Open for Discussion)

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Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16

How is this verse similar to John 14:27?

(Open for discussion)

Does knowing peace is available to you at all times change your view of what peace is?

(Open for discussion)

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PRAY

Talk to God about your anxieties and fears right now, openly and honestly. Remember that His desire for you is to live in His peace. Despite your troubles, don't let your heart be overwhelmed.

Consider the following as you pray together:

- Will you live moment by moment today focusing on the peace that's yours by the power of the Holy Spirit?
- Ask God for a fresh perspective of His gift of peace. Pray for those in a particularly turbulent time, for God to grant them His peace that passes all understanding.
- In what circumstances or relationship in your life can you be a peacemaker? Does knowing peace isn't the absence of conflict change the way you'll approach these situations?

*(Material taken from *Advent: The Weary World Rejoices* by Lifeway Women)

NOTES

WEEK 3

WATCH

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READ

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DISCUSS

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BIG IDEA

This Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son." Advent is a time when we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The most powerful demonstration of God's love for us is that He gave his one and only son to take on flesh, die, and be raised again for us.

But God's love for us didn't begin with the birth of Jesus. His love has no beginning and no end. The Bible tells one long story of God's love for us. And the gift of Jesus is at the center of the story. Now Jesus already existed before His birth, enjoying the perfect loving fellowship of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus loved us from the beginning as He participated in the creation of the world. God didn't create the world because He was lonely or that He needed us. It was out of this overflowing trinitarian love that God made the world and everything in it.

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For God so loved the world that He called what He made good and blessed it. And He blessed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with all they needed to flourish. And best of all, they enjoyed intimate communion with God. But all that changed when they disobeyed God and ate the apple. Their loving fellowship with God was broken, and they felt ashamed and hid from Him.

But out of love, God already put a plan in place to restore us to Himself.

(Taken from Bible.com *Great Expectations* Devotional)

Passages we'll review:

John 13:34-35; John 3:16-17; 1 John 1:4-9;
1 John 3:1

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OPENING

What stood out to you from the message this week? What led you to really think? Did anything challenge you?

Describe an experience when you felt greatly loved. What did that love compel you to do?

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READ*

Read John 3:16-17

How did God show His love for the world?

(He sent His only Son to pay the penalty for sin that we could never pay.)

Why did He do that?

(So that we could have eternal life with Him!)

John 3:17 may be a less familiar verse than John 3:16, but I think many people would find greater comfort if they read John 3:16-17 together. It's as if Jesus is reassuring us that God's motives are really good and that He doesn't want us to fail. Jesus is telling us God's motive isn't to judge us as many people fear, but that God's heart is truly about saving us through Jesus - through His special one and only Son!

NOTES

Read 1 John 4:9-12

God loved us so much He gave His Son. Love compels us to give - time, resources, affirming words, and so forth. How do you see this truth play out in your life?

(Open for discussion)

Read 1 John 3:1

Can you remember a time when something so beautiful or striking left you speechless? Share with your group.

(Open for discussion)

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Now think about the depth of love God showed us through sending His Son and inviting us to be His children. Can you see this love with a new sense of wonder?

(Open for discussion)

How has the wonder of God's love transformed your life? What actions do you take to share it with others?

(Open for discussion)

NOTES

ADVENT

A SEASON OF GREAT EXPECTATION!

PRAY

Consider the following as you pray together:

- Thank God for His immeasurable love in sending Jesus to the earth so we could be reconciled to Him. How can you show the love of God to someone this advent season? Ask Him to help you show that love to others.

- Do you have someone in mind who needs to know about the gift of Jesus? Share with them this Christmas season!

- In what circumstances or relationship in your life can you be a peacemaker? Does knowing peace isn't the absence of conflict change the way you'll approach these situations?

*(Material taken from *Advent: The Weary World Rejoices* by Lifeway Women)

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WEEK 4

WATCH

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READ

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DISCUSS

We hope those who participate in the study walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of amazing discussion.

BIG IDEA

This Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of joy. It is called, from the Latin, Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday in which we say to one another, “Let's celebrate!” But haven't we been celebrating all month, one might ask? Well, in some sense, yes, every day is a celebration of God's goodness, and the culture around us is certainly in celebration mode at this time of year. And that's a wonderful thing.

But the rhythms of the Christian life allow us a different perspective and sometimes a retreat from the facile frenzy around us. Such is Advent. This is the season of expectation, certainly an expectation of the celebration of Jesus's birth. But also the expectation of Christ's return. This is the season in which we contemplate our readiness to receive the Lord or the lack thereof.

NOTES

Luke is the most joyful of all the Gospels. At least he uses the word more than any of the others. But his joy, the joy of the Lord, the joy of Mary, is not precisely what is often packaged to us this time of year. It is a joy that does not escape reality but embraces it. A joy that asks questions. A joy that names injustice. A joy that calls attention to the outsider. A joy that understands the price of pain and says yes anyway. A joy that can sit amid three weeks of solemnity. This is the joy of Advent.

(Taken from Bible.com Great Expectations Devotional)

Passages we'll review:

Luke 1: 26-28; Luke 2:1-35; Hebrews 12:1-2; Psalm 126

OPENING

What stood out to you from the message this week? What led you to really think? Did anything challenge you?

Looking back over your life, what have been the most joy-filled times?

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READ*

Most of us tend to equate joy with good circumstances. Perhaps some of our most joy-filled times include the day we got married, had our children, graduated from college, or landed our first job. But do you think it's possible to have joy in the midst of pain?

(Open for discussion)

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Read Hebrews 12:1-2

According to verse 2, why did Jesus endure the cross?

(In the upside-down kingdom of God, obedience goes hand-in-hand with suffering, and suffering goes hand-in-hand with joy. Jesus' obedience led Him to the cross, and Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him - being in the presence of God.)

It can be tempting to base our joy on our circumstances, but the apostle Paul wrote from a prison cell, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). *Always*. That means when things are going better than planned or worse than imagined, we're to have joy in the Lord. How? In the wise words of Elisabeth Elliot, "The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances."

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Read Psalm 126

When God brought His people out of captivity and restored their fortunes, they were so happy they felt like they were living in a dream! What did their joy propel them to do?

(They were filled with joy! They told others about what God had done for them.)

Think about your salvation story. How has God continued to change you and do a work in your life since that day?

(Open for discussion)

In the upside-down way of the kingdom, joy is a result of our suffering and our service. Can you describe a time when your suffering or service brought you joy?

(Open for discussion)

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PRAY

C.S. Lewis realized, “God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.” As Christ followers, let’s disrobe ourselves of our self-centered rights, clothing ourselves instead “with humility toward one another” (1 Peter 5:5).

Consider the following as you pray together:

- Ask God to renew your understanding of what joy is. Pray for Him to open your eyes to see HIs gift of joy even in suffering and service.
- In what ways is God working in and through you right now during this season that you can share with others?
- How can you serve others this Advent season and share the love of Christ by extending yourself with simple gestures? Make a list of specific ideas.

*(Material taken from *Advent: The Weary World Rejoices* by Lifeway Women)

NOTES

WEEK 5

WATCH

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READ

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DISCUSS

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ADVENT

A SEASON OF GREAT EXPECTATION!

BIG IDEA

The word Advent means arrival or coming. On the church calendar, Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. For Christians, it is a word of anticipation. It is a season of great expectations.

As Advent looks forward to fulfilling all God's promises, the Advent season wrestles with the current world filled with sorrow and suffering.

The Israelites, throughout the Old Testament, waited and longed for rescue. They faced hardship and persecution. In captivity, they waited for release and for the freedom to serve God. In worship, they longed for the prophecies to come true. God promised to rescue them and to provide a redeemer, a messiah. And they waited centuries for Him to come, trusting that God would fulfill their great expectation.

Jesus's long-awaited arrival came over two thousand years ago, so we stand together on the other side of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

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And yet just like the Israelites waited for the Messiah to come, we wait again for His second coming. Advent is not so much looking back but looking ahead, as we walk faithfully now. The medieval Church and Martin Luther emphasize the future hope and the future judgment that will occur at Christ's return.

In this season of waiting, we wait with hope. We long for peace. We experience God's love and desire it more fully. And we claim joy as we now “rejoice in the Lord always,” as Paul proclaims it. And he says, "I'll say it again, even rejoice!

And so we wait for God to act, watching with great expectations. He who promised is faithful.

(Taken from Bible.com Great Expectations Devotional)

Passages we'll review:

Isaiah 9:2-7; Philippians 4:4

NOTES

ADVENT

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OPENING

What stood out to you from the message this week? What led you to really think? Did anything challenge you?

How has your understanding of Advent changed since starting this series?

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READ*

Which week of study resonated with you most? Why?

(Open for discussion)

After this series, how would you answer these questions:

Why did Jesus come to the earth?

(Open for discussion)

What are we to do in response to His coming?

(Open for discussion)

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A SEASON OF GREAT EXPECTATION!

How can you be a bearer of hope, peace, love, and joy to your community?

(Open for discussion)

PRAY

As you close in prayer, thank God for the gift of Jesus. Pray that you would live in anticipation as you wait on Christ's return, when He will make all things new.

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NOTES

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