

AUSTELL GRANDVIEW SDA CHURCH PRESENTS

EXPERIENCE THE
ADVENT

The Family Advent Guide



GRANDVIEWSDA.COM/CHRISTMAS

EXPERIENCE THE ADVENT

The King is coming. The King is Born. Jesus Christ has come and will come again. This is the hope of the Church whom He purchased with His blood. Jesus' coming is the eager expectation and desire of His people. It is our joy because He is our treasure and greatest good. This is the theme of "Advent," formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival." It's the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus in humility and the anxious awaiting of His second advent in glory. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting.

HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

The Advent season officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues until Christmas Eve or Day. There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on tradition and background. Many people use an Advent calendar, typically made up of 24 "windows" containing Scriptures, stories, poems or gifts, to count down the days until Christmas. As each window is opened and the final day draws closer, expectation increases. This reminds us of the hopeful yet anxious waiting God's people experienced as they longed for the promised Savior to come.

Another popular tradition is marking the progression of the season through an Advent wreath made up of five candles. This symbol is borrowed from the emphasis throughout Scripture of Jesus Christ being the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9; 8:12). Each week a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas Eve to represent Jesus' first advent. Through this theme of ever-increasing light penetrating the darkness, we see a picture of the gospel.

Regardless of the tradition, Advent is a significant time in the life of the church. It's an opportunity for believers to remember God's promise to send One who would overcome sin and death forever. God PROMISED a Savior, and He kept that PROMISE perfectly.

NOTE TO FAMILIES

Advent is an opportunity to pause and reflect on the birth of Jesus. But especially for families, this time of year can be filled to the brim with activities and obligations. Before the calendar begins to overflow, set aside a few minutes to consider what you want this season to be for your family. Then make a plan so that a time intended to remember and celebrate doesn't get swallowed up by lesser things.

To help toward that end, we have provided a family portion each week that will help you create intentional time to talk about Jesus. If you choose to use the Advent wreath as the guide suggests, put it in a special, visible place in the house to serve as a reminder of Jesus' coming. There is also a song each week for your family to sing or listen to together.

We wrote the family portions of the guide with preschool and elementary-aged children in mind. If you have older children, consider having each person work through the "Personal Study" section in place of reading the family commentary, and then come together to talk about what you learned.

Week 1
A PROMISED SAVIOR

WEEK 1

-PERSONAL STUDY-

ADVENT IN THE BEGINNING

Many of us grew up with the story of Advent beginning in a stable. But, the story begins in a Garden. When God created the world, all things were just as they should be. Creation functioned in perfect order according to God's beautiful design. Man walked in unbroken relationship with God, fully known and unafraid. But in an instant, all that changed as Adam and Eve disobeyed God's good instruction. They took of the fruit and ate, and sin entered the world. Fellowship broken. Peace shattered. Creation thrown into chaos. Darkness, depravity, fear, shame and selfishness flooded the human heart, separating man from God. The situation was dire.

But right then, amid the darkness, God spoke a word of hope: a Savior would come, born of a woman, to defeat the enemy and deliver God's people.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

GENESIS 3:15

Genesis 3:15 is known as the “first gospel.” From the first moment of our need for rescue, God's PROMISE was there. Before He addressed Adam and Eve, God turned to the serpent and announced that sin would not have the final say and that the schemes of the Serpent, the Devil would not win.

PROPHECIES OF HIS COMING

Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to His people about this promise and gave them things to watch for in order to recognize the Savior's coming. God revealed that the Messiah would be born in the line of David (Isa. 9:6-7), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and in the town of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). He would be a Man of Sorrows—crushed, despised and rejected—justifying many through what He suffered (Isa. 53). The promised Deliverer would be a light overcoming darkness (Isa. 9:2), a Preacher of Good News to the poor (Isa. 61) and One walking in the power of the Spirit (Isa. 42:1). There were hints and shadows of Him everywhere.

God also reminded His people not to lose heart as they waited for the Savior to come. It's important to remember that God did not fulfill His promise right away. His people waited a long time. They spoke of the promised Rescuer from generation to generation, enduring cycles of war, rebellion, captivity and restoration. They watched and waited— anxiously, expectantly—for God's faithfulness.

We can all identify with feeling hopeless, helpless and in desperate need of rescue, especially when it comes to the weight of sin. Heavy and inescapable, we know its effects with every breath—both our own sin and that of others. Our world is full of evidence that something is wrong and needs to be made right. The reason we celebrate Advent is because the story of the Garden doesn't end with man's rebellion—but instead his redemption.

EXPERIENCE THE ADVENT STUDY GUIDE

REFLECTION

Consider the way God used Moses to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 12-14). Was there any way for the Israelites to escape their slavery apart from God's provision and power? How is sin an even harsher, more oppressive master than Pharaoh? What is our only hope of deliverance?

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

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?

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

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.

SONGS OF THE ADVENT

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

WEEK 1

-FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME-

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Have one member of the family light the first candle.

THE READING OF SCRIPTURE

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

"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." THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

"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

REFLECTION

Briefly talk about what it means to be rescued from something. When might you need to be saved from danger? Whom would you call upon to rescue you? For example, if there were a fire, whom would you call to save you? What are rescuers typically like?

Have an adult read the commentary below.

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no sin, pain, sickness, death or sadness. God created Adam and Eve to live in His perfect world with joy and peace. But Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God. When they sinned, God's perfect world broke.

There was a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. Because God is perfect, He cannot be near sin. So Adam and Eve were separated from God. The punishment for their sin would also be placed on all humans who were born after Adam and Eve.

Ask: Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, each of us needs to be rescued from something. What do we need rescue from?

But before Adam and Eve left God's perfect Garden, God made a promise. God promised to send a Rescuer, someone to save Adam, Eve and mankind from the punishment of sin. He promised to send Jesus!

God did not send Jesus to rescue His people right away. God waited thousands of years to send the Rescuer. During that time, God's people faced many hard things. While they waited, God gave them hints and clues about how Jesus would come, what He would do and what He would be like. These hints, written in Scriptures by prophets, would help God's people wait. The verse from Isaiah that we read together after lighting the Advent candle was written while God's people waited those thousands of years for the Savior.

During that time, God made other promises to His children and kept those promises. Each time God made and kept a promise, it helped His children trust that He would be faithful to His promise to send Jesus to rescue them from their sins.

Ask: What do you think it felt like for God's people to wait for the promised Rescuer to come?

Some days, God's children waited patiently. Some days, they waited with tears and frustration. Some days, they wondered if God had forgotten His promise. But God continued to whisper it over and over again as His children waited. And one day, when no one was expecting it, Jesus would come.

God shows us many things about what's He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is the Deliverer, that He rescues His children, in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

PRAYER TIME

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for His goodness and mercy in sending Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

SONG

As a family, sing or listen to "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

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.
Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Parents, make plans for a fun Christmas activity next 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 or when. As the days go by, remind them of your promise and give them hints as to what it might be. Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of God's promise to send a Rescuer and the anticipation God's people felt as they waited.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Create an Advent wreath to use throughout the Advent season.

Create a nativity scene to use throughout the Advent season. If you would like to make this activity last the entire season, consider creating just the stable, animals and Mary and Joseph this week.

Week 2
A PROMISED KEPT

WEEK 2

-PERSONAL STUDY-

THE KING IS BORN

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”

MICAH 5:2

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.

LUKE 2:1-7

Describe a time when you looked forward to an event for a long time.

What emotions did you feel as you waited?

How did you feel when the wait was finally over?

PROPHECY FULFILLED

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the promised Savior, telling the people how to recognize His coming and reminding them that God had not forgotten. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the Son of a virgin, a King to rule according to the lineage of David, ushering in an era of unprecedented peace. Israel watched and waited, filled with longing and expectation for this promised Deliverer.

And then, on a night unassuming and normal, God came—just as He said He would. A young woman named Mary, who was with child, journeyed alongside Joseph, her betrothed, from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted for the census according to Caesar's decree. The couple entered the sleepy Judean town, filled to the brim with the descendants of David, and took refuge in the only place available: a common living area of a peasant family. And when the fullness of time had come, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. He was wrapped in cloths, laid in a manger and given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. And just like that, a whisper in the Bethlehem night, a Child was born, a Son was given.

Four hundred and fifty years of silence had passed since the final words of the prophets. At long last, a cry of deliverance was heard again, uttered from the lips of the Word Made Flesh. This newborn's cry pierced the midnight sky like a trumpet heralding sin's demise and the defeat of death forever for all who would believe. The Ancient of Days stepped into time and wrapped Himself in the frailty of human skin. He came, full of pity, compassion and power, to rescue those lost in darkness and carry them into the kingdom of everlasting light. He came, just as He said He would, to do what we never could.

With hindsight, we see in Jesus the fulfillment of all that the prophets spoke concerning the Messiah. We understand that our Lord has done just what He said He would do in exactly the right way, at exactly the right time. We also see that God is full of compassion. He saw the desperate need of His people. He cared and acted by sending His only Son to save them.

May our hearts be encouraged! Let Advent be a time to reflect on God's good attributes and His faithfulness to do exactly what He said He would.

REFLECTION

Consider the prophecies from Isaiah 9:1-7 and Micah 5:2. How do you see these fulfilled in Jesus' birth?

Think about the circumstances that led Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. What do they show you about God's sovereignty?

The Old Testament contains many prophecies pointing not just to Jesus' birth but also to the salvation He would accomplish. Look up the passages below and see how they illustrate this truth.

OT Prophecy

Genesis 3:15

Isaiah 9:2

Isaiah 53:10-11

Isaiah 53:4

Isaiah 61:1-4

NT Fulfillment

Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 4:4-7; Colossians 2:13-15

Matthew 4:12-17; John 1:4-5; 12:46

Romans 5:1-2

Matthew 8:14-17

Luke 4:16-21

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

RESPONSE

As you make your list of people to buy gifts for, include someone who would never expect to receive a gift from you. Think of the delight you feel in blessing them and consider the love in God's heart as He sent His Son to die for sinners.

In prayer, thank God for His goodness in sending a Savior. Confess places where your confidence in His faithfulness is weak and ask Him for increased trust, belief and hope.

SONGS OF THE ADVENT

O Holy Night

Silent Night

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

WEEK 2

-FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME-

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's mercy in sending a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

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

THE READING OF SCRIPTURE

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. THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

REFLECTION

Have an adult read the commentary below.

Do you remember the promise we talked about last week? God's promise to send a Rescuer? His promise to send Jesus? Well, Jesus came, just like God said He would!

After thousands of years of waiting, on an ordinary night, Jesus came. God gave His people hints and clues about how Jesus would come. He told them that Jesus would come from Bethlehem, be a Ruler and bring peace. Many expected a soldier; some expected a politician. No one expected a baby. But that's how Jesus came.

Ask: If you had been an Israelite, how would you have expected the promised Savior to come?

Mary and Joseph lived in a town called Nazareth. One day, the king gave an order that everyone was to go back to their hometown to be counted for something called a census. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way to the town of Bethlehem, where Joseph's family was from. When they got to Bethlehem, the town was full of other travelers, and there was no private room for Mary and Joseph to stay. So they stayed in someone's living room. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and Jesus, the Savior, was born.

Ask: How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when they finally got to Bethlehem and realized they had nowhere to stay? Do you think God knew that they felt this way?

Jesus, the King of heaven, left His perfect home to be born a baby to a young man and woman. He became fragile and helpless. His room that night was a stable—dirty, smelly and full of noisy animals. His bed was not kingly and luxurious; it was a feed box that animals ate out of. Mary had to wipe old, rotten food out of the manger and cover it with poky straw before she laid her tiny baby in it.

Ask: Is a stable the place you would expect the Savior to be born? Why do you think God decided for His one and only Son to be born there?

But everything that happened that night was exactly what God had planned and promised. Jesus came, just like God said He would. God saw that we needed to be rescued from sin. He cared about us in our need, and He acted. He sent Jesus.

The events of that night, in that stable in the little town of Bethlehem, would change the world forever.

God shows us many things about what's He's like in the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is compassionate—that He sees, cares and acts when His children are in need—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

PRAYER TIME

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending Jesus to be born as a baby who would save us from our sins.

SONG

As a family, sing or listen to "Away in a Manger." As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

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, keep the promise you made to your family during last week's family Advent time. Talk about how you fulfilled the hints and clues you gave them. Discuss the experience of waiting: What was it like to wait? What was it like to finally experience what you had been waiting and hoping for? Remember together God's faithfulness in sending a Savior. It happened just as He said it would.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the baby Jesus piece and add it to the set. Create a set of ornaments that show the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus' birth and their fulfillments in the New Testament.

Create a nativity scene out of Legos.

Use a sock and stuffing to create a baby Jesus doll, wrapped in fabric scraps. Make a manger for the doll out of a paper sack. Let your preschooler care for baby Jesus and have him/her use it to retell Jesus' birth story throughout the week.

EXPERIENCE THE ADVENT STUDY GUIDE

Week 3

TELL OTHERS ABOUT IT

WEEK 3

-PERSONAL STUDY-

THE SHEPHERDS & ANGELS

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 2:8-20

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?
And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?
And how are they to hear without someone preaching?
And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written,
"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

ROMANS 10:14-15

Who is the first person you tell when you hear or experience something good?

TELLING OTHERS OF HIS COMING

We love hearing good news, especially when we're the first to know. There's a big difference between getting a phone call from your best friend about their pregnancy, engagement or new job and finding out about it on Facebook. We cherish being invited to participate in the lives of the people we love instead of simply being spectators.

Today, the ability to share exciting news with others is quick and easy. With one tweet, post, hashtag or group text, we can communicate with the masses. But things were obviously very different in the time Jesus was born. When something important happened, such as the birth of a child, heralds often spread that news. Families welcoming new babies, if they had the means to do so, would hire someone to go throughout the community and announce their happy news. Mary and Joseph, of humble means, did not have the ability to do this. But God Himself provided a company of heavenly heralds to proclaim the birth of His one and only Son.

Imagine the scene: shepherds on the midnight watch, ears and eyes open for signs of danger, sheep bleating in the background. And then, out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord bursts onto the scene with the news of the Savior's birth. It is amazing that God chose this group of men as the first to hear the good news. In the time of Jesus' birth, people regarded shepherds as liars and thieves. Because they were nomadic, moving from place to place to graze their flocks, people didn't readily trust them. Yet it was to men such as this that God announced the Messiah's coming. He told them first! Not royalty, not the religious leaders of the day, but shepherds—lowly and insignificant. He invited them into His story and then mobilized them as the very first evangelists.

As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find Mary, Joseph and the Savior Child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the One through whom salvation would come, they spread the word of all that had taken place.

We are like these men—unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ's birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of His death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into His story, sent out as heralds of both Jesus' first coming and His second. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this good news of great joy—with amazement, belief and action.

REFLECTION

How did you first hear the gospel? Who told you, and how did you respond?

God does not need messengers to communicate His gospel. Why do you think He charged the shepherds with sharing the good news of Jesus' birth? Why do you think He charges us with sharing the good news of salvation?

Did sharing the news of Jesus' birth feel like a burden or a joy to the shepherds? Why? How do you feel about sharing the gospel? What might help you consistently view it as a joyful calling?

What fears keep you from sharing the news that Jesus has come to save sinners? Look up Colossians 1:3-6. How might the assurance in this passage increase your boldness?

Through the proclamation of the angels, God showed His greatness and worth to the shepherds. When do you remember first sensing the beauty of God's glory? God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

RESPONSE

Write a letter to someone who was instrumental in your coming to faith. Whether or not you can actually send them that letter, communicate how the Lord used them to change your heart and life.

In prayer, praise God for loving the weak, despised and lowly and showing them His glory. Thank Him for the person or means He used to share the gospel with you, and ask Him for the boldness and faith to do the same.

SONGS OF THE ADVENT

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

WEEK 3

-FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME-

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how God showed His glory to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. Have one member of the family light the candles from the first two weeks and a third candle.

THE READING OF SCRIPTURE

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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." LUKE 2:8-12

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!" THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

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. LUKE 2:15-17

REFLECTION

Have an adult read the commentary below.

As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus' birth. And He began with an unusual group of people.

Ask: Whom would you expect God to tell first that the promised Rescuer had come?

Kings, queens and religious leaders were not the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus. Instead, God told the most unimportant of people His good news first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals, thieves and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the Rescuer had come. And the way they heard that good news was nothing short of amazing.

While the shepherds watched their sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel that appeared to them was no baby with wings and a harp sitting on a cloud, like some stories might describe. No, this angel was a warrior of the Lord. And he shone with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of Himself.

Ask: How do you think the shepherds reacted when they saw the angel of the Lord?

The angel told the shepherds not to be afraid. God did what He had promised—He sent Jesus to rescue God’s people from their sins. God was making peace between Himself and sinners through Jesus.

Upon telling the shepherds the good news of Jesus’ birth and how to find Him, the angel was joined by thousands of other angels who began singing about the greatness of God. That dark, quiet night sky was filled with a beautiful, blinding light and roaring song that left the shepherds forever changed. Once they had heard the news, the shepherds were desperate to go and find Jesus and see the marvelous thing that God had done.

Ask: What is the greatest news someone has ever shared with you? What did you want to do in response?

So the shepherds abandoned their sheep and raced to Bethlehem. Once they saw baby Jesus there in the manger, they left the stable and began telling everyone they saw the good news that the Savior had come. God used this group of men—men everyone despised—to tell the world that Jesus had come. As Jesus would do throughout His life, God was coming to sinners to show them the way to salvation.

Ask: How can we be like the shepherds? As a family, whom can we tell that Jesus came to save sinners?

God shows us many things about what’s He’s like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is glorious—that He shows His greatness and worth—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

PRAYER TIME

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending angels to share the good news of Jesus’ birth to sinners just like us.

SONG

As a family, sing or listen to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!” Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled. Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies; With th’ angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem.”
Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”
Christ, by highest heav’n adored: Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the favored one.
Veil’d in flesh, the Godhead see; Hail, th’incarnate Deity:
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”
Hail! the heav’n born Prince of Peace! Hail! the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings.

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die: Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”

FAMILY ACTIVITY

One night this week, go out caroling as a family. As you visit homes of neighbors, friends and family, sing songs of praise about the birth and salvation of Jesus. It might be easiest to start at the home of someone you know who loves Jesus as you do. Sing praises to God and invite them to join you at the next house.

Make sure you visit at least one home of people who do not love and trust Jesus. Just like God showed grace and love to the lowliest of sinners, share the good news of Jesus’ birth with someone who does not know God. Maybe that person will hear the good news and will believe in Jesus.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the shepherds and angel pieces and add them to the set.

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.

Draw or paint what you think the night sky might have looked like when the angels appeared to the shepherds.

EXPERIENCE THE ADVENT STUDY GUIDE

Week 4

THE PROMISE OF HIS RETURN

WEEK 4

-PERSONAL STUDY-

THE SIGN OF HIS COMING

“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near.”

LUKE 21:27-28

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years,
and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness,
but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish,
but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then
the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved,
and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved,
what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,
waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God,
because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved,
and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!
But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new
earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these,
be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

2 PETER 3:8-14

Think about the different ways in which you prepare for things in
your life—whether it’s making dinner, getting ready for work or having a guest over.

How much time and intentionality do you invest and why?

What motivates you toward careful preparation?

What adjustments do you make to your schedule, plans, budget, etc.?

THE PROMISE OF JESUS' RETURN

For many of us, Christmas Day is one of the most important days of the entire year, which is obvious given the intense amount of preparation that often goes into it. We adjust schedules, plans and budgets months in advance. Family members travel in from far away. Decorations are perfectly placed, menus are planned, and gifts are purchased, wrapped and hidden. There is intentionality, joy and anticipation; all because this day is significant. And also because we believe it is a reality.

Christmas isn't a pretend day; it's real. We wouldn't go through all the trouble to prepare if we didn't believe Christmas was, in fact, an actual day. We trust it to come on the same date every year. Out of love and expectation, we make every necessary preparation, so that when it becomes our reality, we are ready.

We spend months preparing to celebrate and remember Christ's first coming. How much more should we seek to be ready for His second coming? That day, too, is a reality; an absolute certainty. Unlike Christmas Day, which happens every December 25, only the Father knows the day and hour His Son will return. But He is coming. In the fullness of time, He will split the sky and descend to destroy all wickedness, receive the worship that is rightfully His and usher in a new age—the beginning of unbroken, unending fellowship with Him. We should believe in, think about, look to and prepare for that day.

THE WAITING

The day of Jesus' return is certain and coming, but—so far—it is not today. We find ourselves much like the Israelites long ago—waiting. Which begs the question: How then shall we wait?

Peter asks and answers this very question in his second letter. In love, he reminds his readers that, though the days seem long and weary in the waiting, God is not slow in keeping His promise. He assures them of the absolute reality of the appointed day when Jesus will return. And he then tells them exactly what kinds of lives they are to live in light of this coming day—lives of holiness, godliness and hopeful expectation.

Peter's exhortations are just as much for us today as they were for the believers he wrote to long ago. We too are living in the days of God's patient mercy. We need to be reminded that really believing in and looking toward the reality of Jesus' return changes the way we live. It reorients our hope and perspective. It creates a sense of urgency and sobriety, as well as giddy anticipation—just like a child who cannot wait for Christmas morning.

Let us, the people of God, be found ready in the waiting. As this Advent season comes to a close, take some time to reflect on how the reality of Jesus' return affects the way you live. May your heart be full and your eyes bright as you hope all things in Christ and look to His coming. Take heart, beloved. It won't be long.

REFLECTION

Re-read 2 Peter 3:8-14. What stands out to you in this passage and why? What questions does it leave you with?

How does your life reflect your belief that Jesus will return? Is it something you think about and long for? If not, why do you think that is?

What do you think of when you hear or read the words “be diligent”? What does it look like for you to be diligent in pursuing holiness and godliness? In what areas do you need to fight and flee from sin? In what areas do you need to cultivate love for God and love for others?

Look up Romans 8:22-25. Compare it to Revelation 21:1-7. What future birth do we await? How does looking expectantly to the promised return of Jesus affect the way you see your present circumstances?

RESPONSE

One way God’s children prepare for Jesus’ return is by caring for the poor, vulnerable and outcast (Matt. 25:31-46). As you look ahead to the New Year, think of practical ways you and your family or community can care for the weak in your area.

In prayer, thank God for the reality that Jesus will return and make all things new. Confess any areas of your life—finances, time, relationships, stewardship of your body—where you haven’t been diligent in pursuing holiness. Ask the Lord to show you specific ways you can actively await His promised return in the coming year.

SONGS OF THE ADVENT

O Come All Ye Faithful
Joy to the World
O Come, All Ye Faithful
Go! Tell it on the Mountain We Three Kings
How Sweet Are The Tidings
Teh Adevnt of Our God

WEEK 4

-FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP TIME-

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise that Jesus will return. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible. As a family, light all five candles. Typically there are five weeks of Advent, so light candle 4 on Christmas Eve and then Candle 5 on Christmas day.

Talk about how Jesus, the Light, came into the world to pierce the darkness of sin once, and He will return to do away with it forever.

THE READING OF SCRIPTURE

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." LUKE 21:27-28

"I am going to show you a secret, John," Jesus said, "about when I come back... Write down what you see so God's children can read it, and wait with happy excitement... I'm on my way," said Jesus. "I'll be there soon." THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

REFLECTION

Have an adult read the commentary below.

Jesus came, just like God said He would. But God's promises don't end there. Just like God's people waited with eager anticipation for Jesus to come and rescue them from their sins, we are waiting too.

God made us another promise. He promised that Jesus would return to earth. He has already saved us from our sins if we love and trust Him. But when He comes the second time, He will save us from all the brokenness that sin has caused in the world.

Just like before, God has given us hints and clues about how and when Jesus will return. And just like before, we wait. Sometimes we wait patiently. Sometimes we wait with tears and frustration because we can't wait to live in a world without any sin. Sometimes we forget and wonder if Jesus really will come back. But God is faithful—even when we are faithless. And Jesus will come back.

Ask: How do you think we should be waiting for Jesus' return? What should we do as we wait?

This time, Jesus will not come in the middle of the night as a baby. He will not be weak and helpless. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes back, He will ride out of the sky on a horse, carrying a sword. He will do battle with Satan. And He will win. Our Rescuer is coming back!

While we wait, we wait with hope. We live lives of joy, peace and compassion. We strive to be more like Jesus, every day putting sin to death. And we tell others that Jesus came to save sinners in hopes that they will love and trust in Him, too.

Jesus is coming back. We don't know when, but we know He's coming. Soon. So be ready. Soon we will worship our King, as He deserves, forever. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Ask: As we read these verses and remember God's faithfulness to send a Rescuer and His promise that Jesus will come again, what attributes of God do you see?

PRAYER TIME

Have one family member say a prayer, asking Jesus to come again soon.

SONG

As a family, watch "Christmas with The Chosen " or you may watch the cinematic experience, "A Silent Night at Museum of the Bible".

FAMILY ACTIVITY

Together, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and talk about what Jesus' return will be like, look like and sound like. What do you learn from this passage?

Ask your children what questions they have about Jesus' return and if it's something that scares them to think about. Assure them that Jesus' return will usher in a world with no more sin, sickness, sadness, fights, punishment or having to eat foods they don't like. Even better, those who love and trust Jesus will be with Him forever with no separation. We should look to and long for Jesus' return. And while we wait, we should take seriously His command to love Him first and most, know His Word, care for the poor and share the gospel.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Draw or paint what you think Jesus' return might look like.

Spend time outside watching the clouds. After Jesus died and came back to life, He returned to heaven by going up into the clouds. The Bible tells us He will return, coming out of the clouds.

Spend time imagining what Jesus' return will look like and pray for Him to come soon.

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