



**Advent 2022**  
**Announcing the Christ: Promises and Prophecies**

Summary: Advent reminds us: Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

Last week we finished our study of 2 Corinthians going verse by verse. This week we're doing something new – a topical series on Advent. So, some of you may want to know, what exactly *is* Advent? Well, it's taken from the Latin word *Adventus* translated as *coming*. For more than fourteen hundred years the Church has set aside the four Sundays before Christmas to remember the past and draw faith for the future. I hope that Advent will have the same effect on us.

Let me give you an overview of where we're going. Next week we'll look at the theology of Advent – why was it a big deal that Mary was a virgin and what does it mean for this little baby to be both fully God and fully man? On the third Sunday of Advent, we'll look at the culture of Christmas and ask: if it's supposed to be about Jesus, where did we get Santa and reindeer, Christmas trees and stockings? And then, on December 18<sup>th</sup>, the fourth Sunday of Advent, we'll look at what actually happened two thousand years ago in a small town called Bethlehem.

But this morning we start it all off with a look at the promises and prophecies that pointed to Christ's coming.

Advent was actually inaugurated clear back in Genesis. God began by giving us a gift. He made the world and everything in it and Scripture tells us people were His last creation because we were meant to explore and enjoy everything He had packed into this place. He only gave our ancestors one rule – don't eat from this one tree that I have placed off limits. Everything else is here for you to explore and enjoy.

Of course, the serpent seized on that opportunity and used it to tempt Adam and Eve who decided to trust themselves more than they trusted God and reach for the forbidden fruit. That selfish grab, made in defiance of God, cost them everything. But before driving them out of the Garden which God had made for their enjoyment, He spoke to them about what they had done.

He warned them, life was about to change. The world would become difficult – the ground would now be cursed, work would become hard, and they would die. God said:

**Genesis 3:19** “You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow  
until you return to the ground,  
since you were taken from it.  
For you are dust,  
and you will return to dust.”

If you ever wonder why work feels hard and frustrating, or why life feels so full of friction and futility at times, this is it – it's an effect of the Fall. And yet, even from the very beginning of time, God's grace, mercy, and kindness were on display. For, He also promised the day would come when a woman would give birth to a child who would do battle with the serpent – it was the promise of the first Christmas, the first coming, the first Advent, and it awakened the yearning of expectation.

Over time God continued to clarify the promise – like a parent dropping hints of what the child might find under the tree on Christmas morning.

He promised Abraham to use his family, out of all the others on earth, to bring this special Savior. And He kept narrowing it down – it would be through Abraham's son Isaac, not Ishmael. When Isaac had children, God promised it would be through Jacob, not Esau. When Jacob, later known as Israel, had children, God made it clear the blessing would come through Judah and not one of his eleven brothers.

The prophet Micah revealed Bethlehem's role in the drama.

**Micah 5:2** But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.  
Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you,  
one whose origins are from the distant past.

This was written sometime between the years 739 - 686 B.C., well over 700 years before Jesus was born in a manger but it stirred the expectation of Advent – the coming of Christ. And, it anchored that expectation in what God had set motion long ago – the **ruler** who is coming has **origins from the distant past**.

Around the same time the Prophet Isaiah also gave instruction on what God would do as he spoke words repeated every Christmas:

**Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

That name is important, essential even. **Immanuel** – it means, *God with us*.

So, this child, recognizable by the specific conditions of His birth – of the tribe of Judah, in the town of Bethlehem – will represent and actually embody something very, very important – that God is with us.

Now some of you are like, I thought His name was Jesus. What's up? Yes, His name – the name His mother yelled out the door when she wanted Him to come home for dinner, was Jesus. Maybe we can think of **Immanuel** like a nickname. Imagine a mother that tells her child you're my little snuggle buddy. Or the dad who says, you're my little helper. You're my pride and joy. Well, this Child, this Jesus, was **Immanuel**, *God with us*.

We'll talk more about His dual identity next week. But for now, you need to know what this would have meant to the people who heard it. You need to know Isaiah is writing to people who are not doing well spiritually, they're living life their own way and making their own choices and he tells them, you need to turn back to God and trust in Him for salvation because life is about to get ugly. In fact, your only hope is that God sends a savior to you because, you're not going to be able to save yourself from what's coming.

And so, Isaiah writes another of the famous sections of Scripture we remember each Advent. He sets it up this way:

**Isaiah 9:2** The people who walked in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,  
Upon them a light has shined.

Now this is something you need to feel. Because these are the people who are given the hope of Advent, the hope of the coming of Christ. This is their condition – and no doubt, it's the condition of some of us too. They are **the people who walked in darkness** – they're the ones who will **see a great light**.

Now, that's great when you're looking back, right? That's great, after the light has shone and you can share those stories – man, remember when we were so messed up? Remember when we went through that really rough stretch? Remember when life was dark and hard? It could have been that way because of your own choices or because of the things happening to you, or a mix of both, but now you can say, Praise God, He showed up and saved me!

This is the mood of one of my favorite Christmas Songs, one that gives me goosebumps - O, Holy Night says

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining, [that means wanting really, really bad]  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope- the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!*

This song expresses the joy of a people who have had their Advent, people who, to use Isaiah's words have **seen a great light**. But what if you're on the *not-yet* side of things? What if you're still walking in darkness? What if you've still got a mailing address in the **land of the shadow of death** and the light hasn't **shined** yet? What if your soul hasn't 'felt it's worth' and you haven't had your 'new and glorious morn?'

You need to know that God sees you in your situation. He knows exactly what you need, and has promised to send you help...one day. You're longing, aching, weeping and screaming for Advent. Maybe you're even bitter and cynical because everything just seems so...dark. You need that thrill of hope. You need Advent. You need the coming of Christ.

Well, you need to know that's exactly what God has promised and delivered. You need to know that Isaiah went on to reveal the source of this glorious [light that shone in the darkness](#), that broke as a 'new and glorious morn:'

**Isaiah 9:6** For unto us a Child is born,  
Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called  
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace  
*There will be no end,*  
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,  
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice  
From that time forward, even forever.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

You have to know this was the promise to a people who were in darkness. A people desperate for help and comfort and correction. They were in a mess of their own making, *and* surrounded by bad situations – specifically their neighbors the Assyrians who were looking to invade. But God gave them the hope of Advent, the hope of a coming Child who would be King.

And all of this would happen *because God took the initiative*. Notice, [Unto us a Son is given](#) – by whom? By God! And who will make it happen? [The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this](#).

As ever and always, God is the great initiator. He told Adam and Eve what He would do. He told Abraham what He would do. He told Isaac and Jacob what He would do. He told Moses and David, Hosea and Isaiah and others throughout the ages. God told people they needed to be saved, *and that He would do it*. This was and is the message of Advent: we need help, we need salvation and comfort and guidance – we are entangled with our sin and suffering from our circumstances - we are miserable on our own, we need God.

And eventually, He announced, the time had come. He sent an angel to Zachariah, who would have a son named John. Known as the Baptist, he would repeat Isaiah's message, calling people who had wandered away from God to return to Him, to repent and have their sins forgiven – to turn from darkness toward God's glorious light.

Then God sent an angel to a young girl named Mary to tell her she was about to have a marvelous, mysterious, miraculous pregnancy. And, He sent an angel to her fiancé Joseph to tell him: 'this is legit, don't dump her.' When she finally gave birth in that manger we've all come to know so well, God sent angels to announce what had happened to shepherds who came into town to see for themselves.

This was only the beginning, Advent had arrived, the light was kindled in the darkness, but it wasn't blazing yet, the child had to grow, mature into manhood, and fulfill His ministry.

In time He would do just that. You probably know there are four gospels in the Bible – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are basically like biographies of Jesus written by men who knew Him, or in Luke's case by someone who knew a lot of people who knew Him.

Well, people tell stories differently. I bet if I asked each member of your family what happened over Thanksgiving, they would all tell a different story. That doesn't mean they're making things up, it just means they're telling it from their point of view. So, each person might tell me something I didn't hear from anyone else, and then there would be a few big details that every includes.

Well, one of the things everyone includes in their version of the story of Jesus' life is the ministry of John the Baptist. All four gospel authors tell us that John went around calling people to repent of their sins and be baptized as a sign of cleansing from their past so that they could be ready for the coming of the Christ. And they all mention, very specifically, that John quoted from Isaiah:

**Isaiah 40:3** The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way of the LORD;  
Make straight in the desert  
A highway for our God.

John was saying: yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. The light is about to blaze in the darkness, so get ready. Prepare yourself. Turn to God and surrender. The King is coming, let's be ready for His arrival.

This, again, is the message of Advent – a sense of expectation that compels us to active response. Christ is coming! Let us be ready to meet Him, ready to receive Him, let us turn to Him for all our needs.

If you read the gospels you know, some people did just that. They heard Christ calling and they came, or they sought Him out – they knew they needed Jesus. But others did not. They resisted Him and rejected Him. Some directly opposed Him and were suspicious of His motives and methods. They eventually collaborated to arrest Him and seek His crucifixion. The light came, the long-awaited Advent arrived and they snuffed it out because they loved their own darkness.

For three days and nights His body lay in the darkness of the tomb, but God raised Him from the dead and He returned to sit at the right hand of the Father where He is today waiting for the time of His return, His Second Advent, when He will gather the Church for what the Bible describes as a holy, heavenly wedding, where we will be united with Him in peace and harmony – the days of our darkness and tears vanquished forever.

Today we live in the time between these two Advents – the first and second coming of Christ. Traditionally, one of the goals of Advent was to remind Christians of this truth. In fact, if you go back and look at old hymnals – books of songs used by the church - you will find groups of hymns recommend for use on certain occasions, and if you look at hymns marked as ‘good for Advent’ they often make reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

If you follow a ‘Through the Bible in a Year’ reading plan - which I highly recommend you do at least once – these plans often end with the book of Revelation in December. For a long time I had a problem with that, because I felt this dissonance between the conflict, wrath, and cosmic battles of Revelation and then the whole attempt at feeling holly and jolly for Christmas. It didn’t seem to work. But I realized, that’s because I wasn’t seeing things right. I didn’t understand that the message and meaning of Christmas and the message and meaning of the book of Revelation actually reinforce each other.

Advent is intended to remind me that Christ has come, and therefore, Christ will come again. God promised He would come to a people living in darkness, that He would offer salvation and be *Immanuel*, *God with us*. All of that is true, but it’s not complete, and it’s not final. Today we are a people with access to the promises, and entrance to the Kingdom, but it’s only a taste, it’s not the fullness we long for.

Revelation promises us that the Christ who came will come again, not as a cooing child, but as a conquering king. He will not call people gently; He will command for them to kneel. We read in:

**Revelation 19:11** Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:  
**KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

Christmas is meant to provide us with a preview of what’s to come. The baby in the manger becomes the Savior on the Cross and ultimately the conquering king – Santa and his reindeer have nothing on Christ and His stallion.

Somewhere we lost sight of this, and it affects our entire approach to the season. Most of us only remember half the promise of Advent. We remember that Christ has come, but not that He will come again. And so, there seems to be this growing sense that Christmas is broken – it doesn’t work, it over promises and under-delivers. I think it’s directly influenced by the commercialization of Christmas – the growing attempt to make

something cheerful and nostalgic out of it all as if there's enough *right here and now* to satisfy you completely.

But there is a growing number of people who feel disappointed and disenchanted by it all. I was in a coffee shop last week; it was a few days before Thanksgiving and I heard two people talking about the fact that Christmas was right around the corner and one of them told the other she wasn't that big on celebrating Christmas anymore – it's too expensive.

I don't know her circumstances, but it's easy for any of us to understand what she's saying. When you look at what some people spend on decorations, and then outfits for parties, and gifts for parties and all the collections that are taken up at school and at work for all kinds of purposes, maybe throw in some travel or some hosting and then buy gifts for all the people on your list...it adds up quickly.

Or what about calendar cost of Christmas, the time it takes, and the exhausting pace of the season because everyone one you know and everything you're involved in wants to have a Christmas party or gift exchange and there's just no way you can make it all fit?

For some people, Christmas is loaded with emotions. We have people in this church for whom Christmas is the hardest time of year because it's associated with the loss of people they love, so everyone else is joyful and they don't want to sabotage that, but it makes their own loss doubly hard to endure.

And for yet another group, Christmas feels lonely, a stinging reminder of broken or unfulfilled relationships.

And that says nothing of those who put all their expectations on the big day, hoping the thing they really, really want is under the tree. They'll be crushed with disappointment when they realize it's not.

This is the difference between what I've come to call Commercial Christmas and the Advent season.

Commercial Christmas tells you all your needs and desires can be met here and now. You just need the right outfit for the right party with your friends, the right shopping trip to buy the right gifts, wrapped with the perfect wrapping paper and bow, the right amount of snow to fall on Christmas Eve, and a sweet picture-perfect morning at home with your family in matching PJs where everyone receives exactly the perfect gifts...and a new puppy.

If you can do all that, you'll make just the right memories, everyone will think you're an amazing friend, mom, brother, son, boss, whatever and you'll enjoy a nice couple of days off ... before heading to that amazing New Year's party.

Advent on the other hand, tells you the world is dark and broken and there's something dark and broken inside of you and everyone else you know as well. But God knows that. And He wants to save you from that. He's been weaving together a plan of salvation

throughout human history. We've already seen the first part of it come together – when He sent His Son to be born to a virgin and a carpenter in Bethlehem a little over two thousand and twenty years ago. Jesus was, and is, the light of the world. He is [Immanuel](#), God with us. And He will come again.

Advent tells us to look back and remember *so that* we can look out and up, in hope. The answer to your needs is not going to be found under the tree. It's not going to be found by giving the perfect gift, or finding the perfect dress to wear to your friend's party. You won't solve all your problems by giving the perfect gift or throwing the perfect party. You won't even fix it all by coming to the church's tea or Christmas Eve service if you think that just being at this religious event has some power all to itself.

The answer is found in Jesus. Only Jesus. Jesus who came, and Jesus who will come. Jesus who is here with us now. [Immanuel](#).

My friends, Commercial Christmas is everywhere and it will crush you. But Advent is calling. It can be hard to see through all the lights and the trees and stockings and bows, it can be hard to remember with all the shopping and parties, but Advent is calling, telling us: Christ has come, Christ will come again. Look for Him, look to Him, rest in Him and slowly but surely, you'll look like Him.

Now, maybe you need to know what that looks like. Maybe you're worn out by Christmas and feel like it's missing something because you've never really known Jesus at all. Maybe you need to be born again. If that's true, the process is as simple as a child asking a generous father for a really nice gift. You just talk to God, tell Him you've been living life your own way up to this point and you're sorry, you want to live for Him, according to His directions, from this day forward. Or, you've tried fixing things on your own, handling things on your own, and you finally realize you can't – you need His help and you're willing to do it His way.

Tell Him you believe Jesus came, you believe He died for your sins, and you believe He rose and will come again. If you do that, He promises, guarantees that He will hear you, forgive you and give you that new life. He will no longer hold your sin against you. He will bring you out of darkness and into His life. You can stop looking for the magic of Christmas, or people, or parties, to fix what's wrong with your life and anchor yourself in the hope of Advent instead knowing that Christ has come and Christ will come again. He is Immanuel – God with us.

Let's pray.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Advent 2022

### Announcing the Christ: Promises and Prophecies

Summary: Advent reminds us: Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

- What is your favorite Christmas Carol? How do the lyrics point you to Christ? Do they make any reference to His Second Coming?
- How much experience have you had with the season of Advent? Did your family or church emphasize it when you were growing up?
  - Do you have any Advent traditions?
- Is Christmas hard for you or something you look forward to?
- According to Isaiah 9 the coming ruler will be known as [Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace](#). Which of these aspects do you crave most?
- What does knowing Jesus as Immanuel mean to you?
- When has God shown up as the light you needed in a season of darkness?
- How does hope help you endure difficult days?
- How does Commercial Christmas affect you? Is it thrilling or exhausting or a mix of both?
- How can the hope of the Second Coming, or the Second Advent, affect your experience of Christmas this year?