



Advent 2021

PREPARING FOR THE KING

How to Use This Guide

As we spend the next few weeks preparing for Christmas in our Advent season, we want to see how the entire Old Testament leads to the birth of Jesus.

We have planned three weeks of content for you in the lead up to Christmas, and hope that your group will use the fourth week of Advent for Caroling, Volunteering, or hosting a Christmas Party.

In Week 1, you will read from Genesis 1-3 to see how Jesus' birth was promised from the first few books of the Bible. In Week 2, you will read from Isaiah to study how God spoke through prophets to the Israelites of a future Messiah who would save them from exile. And in Week 3, you will read the birth story of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke.

In addition, we have provided some content for a "Christmas at Home" reading and prayer session that can be done individually or with a group.

Watch the Sermon

In Person on Sundays at 10am:
2234 W Temple St, Los Angeles, CA 90026

Online Live on Sundays at 10am: thriveLA.online.church

Archived: thriveLAchurch.com/media

Discussion

In your groups you will discuss the week's sermon and Bible readings with reflection/discussion questions designed to help you go deeper.

Join or Start a Group

Go to thriveLAchurch.com/thrive-groups or text "Groups" to 323-709-0711 to learn more and find a group

Advent Season Happenings

Advent Discoveries Devotionals

We will be posting Advent Discoveries devotionals to the Thrive LA instagram (@thrivelosangeles) stories throughout the month of December, and are giving printed copies out on Sundays throughout the Christmas season! We would love for you to join us in taking a few moments in the 12 days leading up to Christmas to intentionally slow down and experience what Jesus' presence means in our world and in our lives.

FosterAll Donations

Deliver Christmas this season to a group of foster boys who wouldn't get to celebrate Christmas otherwise! Thrive LA is collecting donations for 10 foster boys (ages 11-17) in our community through our partnership with FosterAll. We are looking for 30 ~\$25 gifts (3 for each boy). If you're willing to donate, bring your (unwrapped) gifts to church, or order online to be delivered to the Alesso home (226 S Avenue 21, Los Angeles CA 90031) by December 15th.

Helping Young Moms

We also have an exciting opportunity to provide baby clothes to young moms at St. Anne's who have grown up in foster care and now have children of their own! Here is their Amazon wishlist:

https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/C861C16VSN06?ref_=wl_share

Church at Home Guide

We're providing a Church at Home activity guide (page 7) in lieu of in-person gatherings on December 26 and January 2. It's our hope that you enjoy experiencing Jesus both individually and collectively with any folks you may gather with this holiday season, and that this guide helps you in that! We'll all be gathering back together on January 9th and can't wait to see you.

Week 1: Promised From the Beginning

The story of Jesus begins in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Jesus is one of the three “persons” that make up the Holy Trinity along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus has always existed, and his incarnation (God born in the form of a human) was promised very early in the story of humanity. Tonight we are going to read the verses that promise this Messiah as well as talk about why God needed to send His son to rescue the Earth.

Icebreaker:

What is your favorite Christmas tradition?

Bible Project Video:

As a group, watch this video from Bible Project that describes the story of the Messiah from the beginning of Genesis <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/messiah/>

Bible Reading:

Open your Bibles to the very first page. Tonight we are going to read from Genesis 1-3. If you would like to read all of Gen. 1-3 as a group, go for it! If you would like a shorter version to focus on and discuss, here are the verses:

- Creation of Humanity: Gen. 1:26-31; 2:15-24
- Fall of Humanity: Gen. 3:1-13
- Promised Messiah: 3:14-19, especially focus on Gen. 3:15

Discussion:

Spend some time in a circle and give everyone an opportunity to answer the following questions:

- Why do we need this “promised messiah”?
- We see in these verses that God had a plan from the beginning to save humanity. What does this plan tell you about God’s character and his relationship to humanity?

Prayer:

Ask your group how you can pray for each other this holiday season. Is there anything specific you like to see happen in your life over the next few weeks that we can pray to God for?

Week 2: Prophecy

As we think about Christmas in this advent season, we want to focus on why Jesus came and who He came for. Last week we learned how Jesus was promised from the first three chapters of Genesis. Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, there are many references to a future king who will save the nation of Israel and ultimately the world from its judgment. The Prophet Isaiah gives us the most clear promises of this future king.

Icebreaker:

Do you have a favorite Christmas song?

Bible Project Video:

Watch this video on the second half of Isaiah to learn more about the prophet's promises of a future Messiah.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/isaiah-40-66/>

Bible Reading:

This week we will be reading a few different verses from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 40-55 details the many promises of Jesus coming, and we have picked out a few verses for you to look at today. For each verse, have a different person in the group read the verse.

- Isa. 7:14 (Virgin Birth)
- Isa. 9:6 (Promised Ruler)
- Isa. 49:7 (Servant)
- Isa. 50:4-9; 52:13-53:9 (Rejected and Killed)
- Isa. 53:10-12 (Lives Again)

Discussion:

- We see multiple descriptions of this promised king such as Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Servant, and Rejected One. Which of these descriptions catch your focus the most? Why?
- Does seeing the promises of Jesus through Isaiah give you any new thoughts on Jesus?
- How does seeing the promises of Jesus in the Old Testament affect how you think about your relationship with Jesus today?

Prayer:

Pray as a group to end your evening. Is there a person who comes to mind whom you would like to pray for tonight? If anyone would like to share something they would like to see happen in a friend or family member's life over the holidays, feel free to share and pray for that person.

Week 3: Jesus Is Born

This week we are reading Jesus' birth story from Luke 2:1-21. Luke wrote about Jesus' life in his gospel, and in these verses he describes the birth and first few days of Jesus' life. The promises of the Old Testament have come true, and angels appear to give glory to the Son of God.

Icebreaker:

Do you have a favorite Christmas memory?

Bible Project Video:

Watch this video from Bible Project on the Birth of Jesus.
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-luke-1/>

Bible Reading:

Have someone in your group read from Luke 2:1-21. As you read, think about the promises of Isaiah that we read from last week. The savior has been born, and the world will never be the same.

Discussion:

- What stands out to you as you read Jesus' birth story today?
- Put yourself in Mary and Joseph's shoes. What do you think they were feeling and thinking as they have been given the opportunity to raise Jesus?
- What is something you have learned about God through this advent season?

Prayer:

Pray as a group as you go your separate ways for the next couple of weeks. How can we be praying for you until we see you again in the New Year?

Week 4: Church at Home

Thrive LA will not be meeting on December 26 and January 2. Since we won't be meeting around Christmas, we wanted to provide a reading and prayer guide for you that you can either go through by yourself or with a group. We hope you have a wonderful Holiday season and look forward to meeting again as a church on January 9th. Enjoy a few fun activities as you celebrate and contemplate today!

Advent Music

Create a worshipful, festive vibe with this Spotify Christmas Hymns Playlist:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3SV9Rioa5ghofOxzVbOxWC?si=ce22073128934903>

Advent Flavor

Bake up a family favorite!

"This shortbread recipe has been handed down for generations and is the exact flavor of Christmas in my family. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do!" - Katie Alesso

Nana's Scotch Shortbread

1 c. butter	½ c. cornstarch
½ c. powdered sugar	1 ½ c. flour
Pinch salt	

Mix all ingredients thoroughly. Roll out to about ¼" thick. Cut in 1" squares. Mark each with the tines of a fork in rectangular patterns on top to prevent bubbles (they always remind me of apartment building windows after I do this). If dough is too soft to move, refrigerate after cutting and marking. Place cookies on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake 10-12 min., until barely golden. Don't overbake. Remove to cooling rack, then to a cookie tin.

Advent Candle

A meaningful part of the Advent celebration is the lighting of candles that remind us of Jesus entering our reality.

In this time, we suggest you light a candle as a symbol for the hope we have received through the love of Jesus. Take a deep breath, sit in your favorite chair, maybe with a cup of hot cocoa. Let this be a time of reflection and celebration as we ponder the birth of Jesus, and participate in guided Lectio Divina on the other side.

Week 4: Church at Home, continued

In this reading from the gospel of Matthew, we get to see another writer's perspective of Jesus' birth story (Matthew 1:18-25). We want to encourage you to read and pray through this passage in a guided practice called "Lectio Divina." The practice has four steps: Read, Meditate, Pray, & Contemplate.

Read:

Read Matthew 1:18-25. Don't worry too much if you don't understand the full context at this point. You are reading from the Gospel writer, Matthew, about the birth of Jesus Christ.

Meditate:

Read Matthew 1:18-25 a second time, more slowly than the first. Stop to meditate over any specific words or phrases that are feeling emphasized in your mind. Take time over this section to really think about what is happening in this passage and possibly try to put yourself in the shoes of one of the characters.

Pray:

Read Matthew 1:18-25 a third time. Pray and ask God if there is something specific He wants to teach you through these verses. Feel free to take some time to slow down and talk with God about what you are feeling.

Contemplate:

Read Matthew 1:18-25 for a fourth and final time. Thank God for the opportunity to have His Scripture and for the time to read. Take a moment to thank Jesus for coming to Earth as we think about His birth this Christmas.