



20 GOD WITH 22 US

SEASON OF ADVENT

Did you notice that Costco and Target had their Christmas decorations on display with their Halloween decorations two months ago? It seems like this year, perhaps more than others, Christmas just can't get here soon enough. Why is that? What do we love about this season? Why does it seem so needed this year? What is it that we are all longing for?

The word 'Advent' means 'arrival.' For centuries, the Advent Season has made the connection between the longings of our hearts and the promised Christ. The baby lying in the manger announced the hope of God's promised peace as the presence of the eternal God dwelled with us.

The contents of this guide are simple and, compared to other years, really short. It is our hope that the Spirit of the living God would fill the space between and lead you to encounter the promised savior.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE.

Below you will find five, one-page guides that invite you to reflect on the Advent of Christ as we move towards Christmas. There is one guide for each week of Advent. Although you can get a lot out of this time engaging with the Scripture by yourself, if you live with others, whether a roommate, a spouse, or kids, we encourage you to invite them to join you for this short candlelight reading each week.

WEEK ONE

OPENING QUESTION. What are you longing for this Christmas season?

Take a moment to prayerfully consider this question. If others are with you, invite them to share. It is important that you allow yourself and others to respond honestly. It's totally okay to say, 'sleep,' or 'toys,' or chocolate cake.'

PRAYER. Go to God with the desires that are shared. Marvel at the God who created you to both desire greatly and to be satisfied fully. Remember, your deepest longings can only be satisfied by Christ.

CANDLE. Take a moment to light the 1st Candle of Advent.

READING. After the candle is lit, read **Isaiah 9:6**.

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.

DISCUSS IT. Which of the four names of the promised Messiah resonate most with you and why? In what way are these four names good news for our world? How are they good news for you this holiday season? Consider the simple phrase, 'for unto us.' The promised Christ came for 'us.' Reflect on this short phrase and ask the Spirit of God to fill you with hope and gratitude. Then, when you are ready, close your time in prayer.

WEEK

TWO

OPENING QUESTION. When was the last time you were really excited about something and were forced to wait? What was it like for you to have to wait?

PRAYER. God invites us to come to Him expectantly. Take a moment to ask the Lord to bless this time as you celebrate the coming of Christ.

CANDLE. Take a moment to light the 2nd Candle of Advent.

READING. After the candle is lit, read **Matthew 2:1-2, 11-12.**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

DISCUSS IT. The magi were most likely priests from Persia (modern-day Iran) who searched the night sky looking for knowledge. The star they saw invited them on a long journey toward Jesus. It took about two years for them to find Him. (Yes, this means your Hallmark nativity has been lying to you all these years.) Their wait was long but worth it. These Magi were not allowed to worship Yahweh in the Temple and yet, the Lord invited them to marvel in the presence of the newborn King! How do you imagine the Magi felt when they fell before Christ? How is the invitation of the Magi good news for you in this season?

WEEK

THREE

OPENING QUESTION. When was the last time you received a gift that was truly unexpected? What was it like for you when you received it?

PRAYER. Take a moment to thank God for this season and to ask Him to stir your joy as you reflect on the Savior.

CANDLE. Take a moment to light the 3rd Candle of Advent.

READING. After the candle is lit, read **Luke 2:8-12.**

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.”

DISCUSS IT. As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus’ birth. The arrival of the promised Messiah was the greatest news to hit the world! Who would you expect to be the first to hear the news? In the first century, Shepherds were usually outcasts. Most people would avoid them. But the Lord made sure they were the first to hear the good news! What do you find most astonishing about their encounter with the angels? Why do you think they were filled with fear? Why do you think the shepherds were so quick to go and find Jesus?

WEEK

FOUR

OPENING QUESTION. The holidays can feel so hurried. What are some of the things that distract you from slowing down and being with Jesus?

PRAYER. Take a moment to breathe and be with Jesus. What has He been teaching you and inviting you into this Advent season? Spend time in prayer before you continue.

CANDLE. Light the 4th Candle of Advent.

READING. After the candle is lit, read **LUKE 2:3-7**.

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 clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

DISCUSS IT. The Messiah arrived! Most folks expected trumpets and red carpet. They were looking for a warrior, maybe a wealthy ruler, possibly an army and definitely a palace. Everyone was waiting but His arrival was not what anyone expected. What details of the night do you think Mary and Joseph struggled with the most? Do you think the circumstances of the birth tempted them to doubt the word that was spoken to them about the Messiah? How do you respond when your circumstances aren't what you expect? How is God inviting you to celebrate Christ in the ordinary and unexpected?

WEEK FIVE

PRAYER. This is the final week of Advent. On Saturday, Sojourn will gather with 100s of our neighbors to declare the good news of God's promised peace. Begin tonight by reflecting on that promise. Peace. Where, in your life, do you need to experience the peace of God? After you have had time to reflect, go to the Lord in expectant prayer.

CANDLE. Light the 5th and final Candle of Advent.

READING. After the candle is lit, read **Isaiah 9:2, 61:1-3.**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned . . . The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

PRAYER. Luke 4, declares the good news that Isaiah 61 is about Christ who came to rescue. Reflect on the work of Jesus and the kinds of people who are specifically mentioned in Isaiah 61. What encourages you about this passage? How is the arrival of Jesus good news for the world. Take time to pray for Sojourn's Eve on the Green gathering. Use the passage above to guide you in your prayer for our community.