

Advent

2017



www.stonegatefellowship.com/christmas

What Is Advent?

The word “**Advent**” comes from a word in Latin that means “**to come**” or “**to arrive.**” For many centuries, followers of Jesus have celebrated His arrival by participating in various traditions beginning four Sundays before Christmas and that span the whole month of December.

Some traditions involve the use of “windows” that are opened to reveal a poem, Scripture, story, or picture. Other traditions involve the use of an Advent candle or candles. What’s **most important** in each of these traditions is not the traditions themselves, but how each activity points our hearts back to the good news of Jesus coming into the world.

You may currently have traditions you celebrate or you may not. Either way, this guide is intended to help you remember and reflect on the arrival of Jesus.

How To Use This Guide

In this guide, you will find **three weekly devotions** that are designed around a central theme related to the Advent of Jesus. The intent is for you to use this guide with a small group of other people. For example, you can gather your friends, family, children, etc, once a week and read through this together.

Throughout each devotional, we’ve selected key scriptures that briefly outline the story of Jesus coming into the world. You’ll notice that each scripture is meant to be read aloud by someone in your group. To help the devotional run smoothly, we suggest you delegate the reading of the scripture passage to one or two people before you begin. Unless otherwise prompted, you (or someone you select) will be narrating the story to your group each week.

You’ll also notice the lines of a famous Christian hymn at the end of each devotional. The hymn’s title, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” speaks to the very heart of the Advent season.

Each week you’ll read a section of this hymn as a way to reflect on the importance of God coming to be with us in the person of Christ.

When your devotional comes to a close, we invite you to come to our Christmas Eve service on December 24 where we will—as a church family—participate in the final week of Advent together. During our Christmas Eve gathering, we will remember the Advent of Jesus, celebrate His amazing grace, and look back on His arrival as the greatest gift we could ever receive.

Overview

1. Advent is a celebration of the arrival of Jesus. There are many traditions that people participate in, but they should always cause us to reflect on the coming of Jesus.
2. This guide has 3 devotionals meant for the 3 weeks prior to Christmas day.
3. Gather with others to read through this guide.
4. Take note of the hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” at the end of each devotion.
5. The final devotional will be read at our Christmas Eve service.
6. Visit www.stonegatefellowship.com/christmas for more information.

Before You Get Started

Before you begin your devotional, we would like you to consider planning a special activity after the third week of your Advent celebration. Don't be afraid; this activity is not complicated, but it will involve a little planning on your part.

Advent Activity

1. Identify who you are going to work through your Advent guide with.

This could be family, friends, co-workers, neighbors or anyone. Let them know that you have a special surprise coming for them in three weeks—after you've completed your final devotional together.

2. Plan a surprise for your group after the third week is completed.

This could be a gift or activity, just don't let them know what it is. Let them build their own anticipation and encourage it however you see fit.

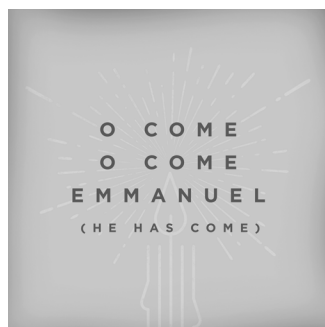
If you'd like some suggestions, here are two ideas you may consider:

- Personalized, hand-written notes
- Give an early Christmas gift
- Go see a Christmas show together
- Hot Cocoa and Christmas lights
- Watch a Christmas Movie together

Why do we do this?

Our goal is to impart a sense of anticipation to our loved ones that was once felt by God's people as they longed for God's gift of a Savior.

The arrival of Jesus was surrounded by much anticipation. As people who look back on Jesus' arrival, it's hard for us to relate to such anticipation. And this is what your activity will be for: to instill a sense of anticipation into your family that God's people would have felt for centuries leading up to the Messiah's arrival.



Advent Song

Our Stonegate worship team has arranged a version of "O come, O Come, Emmanuel" for this Advent guide. As you make your way through this devotional, download and listen to the song.

For download links visit: www.stonegatefellowship.com/christmas

Remember

Get your Christmas Eve service tickets today at

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Week 1: The Universal Longing

Background

The story of Advent is a beautiful story—a story of personal longing, expectation, and an amazing God who never forsakes His people. It's the story of Jesus. It's a story of hope, promises, and most of all: of God's amazing love for His people.

The center of this story revolves around Jesus Christ coming into the world, but it doesn't begin here. Rather, the story of Advent actually begins much, much earlier.

The story of Advent doesn't begin in a manger but in a garden. In this garden, we read about Adam and Eve—the first people who God created to enjoy a personal relationship with. This was not because God was in need of a personal relationship, but because He wanted His love to be shared in a very special way.

As such, God's love overflowed in the creation of galaxies, planets, and stars. Like an artist who carefully blends colors on a canvas, God's love overflowed in the majestic creation of the physical world.

Most of all, God's love overflowed in the creation of us—human beings made in His unique, amazing image. More than sunsets and mountains, more than stars and oceans—God made people as the crowning jewel of His glorious creation.

Ask someone to read the following passages:

God saw all that he had made and he loved them. And they were lovely because he loved them. But God saved the best for last. From the beginning, God had a shining dream in his heart. He would make people to share his Forever Happiness. They would be his children, and the world would be their perfect home.

(THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE).

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26a, 27)

The Advent of Longing

During this time, people enjoyed a perfect relationship with God. They did not long for Him, but rather enjoyed Him as the supreme object of their love and devotion. But, this relationship did not last forever. Shortly after the story gets underway, we discover a serpent who was out to destroy this perfect relationship between God and His beloved people. And that's exactly what he did.

The serpent told the man and the woman that God's love for them was less than perfect, causing them to consider what life would be like without God. Rather than trust in God's forever-love for them, they believed the serpent's lie and were changed forever.

Ask someone to read the following passage:

“The snake’s words hissed into her ears and sunk down deep into her heart, like poison. Does God love me? Eve wondered. Suddenly she didn’t know anymore. ‘Just trust me,’ the serpent whispered. ‘You don’t need God. One small taste, that’s all, and you’ll be happier than you could ever dream...’ Eve picked the fruit and ate some. And Adam ate some, too. And a terrible lie came into the world. It would never leave. It would live on in every human heart, whispering to every one of God’s children: ‘God doesn’t love me.’” (The Jesus Storybook Bible).

This moment marked the first occasion of what has been true for every person throughout history: a universal longing for God’s presence. Every day in a multitude of ways, we all search to recover the joy of that relationship we were meant to experience. We long for God’s presence – for God’s happiness – to fill our lives. Yet, we search endlessly for other things to find what only can be found in God Himself.

A Promise Made

Thankfully, this is not the end of the story. Even though Adam and Eve rejected God and even though we have looked to other things for God’s love, God made a promise to rescue us.

It is this promise of rescue that forms the center of our joy this Advent season. Because God loves us so much, he determined not to leave us without the hope of rescue. We know this because in spite of Adam and Eve’s disobedience God whispered a promise to them and to us (you will read the following passage out loud):

“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).

Response

As your devotional time comes to a close, read the following lines of the hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Having read this together, spend some time in prayer. Either out loud or quietly, ask God to show each of you how much He loves you and thank Him for sending Jesus.

Week 2: The Promise of a King

Background

In the early stages of God's rescue mission, He chose a specific group of people that He would use to bring the Savior into the world. The nation of Israel became God's chosen people whom God would richly bless. But time and time again, Israel would turn away from God. Rather than submit to God's loving authority over their lives, Israel believed the lie of the serpent—that God didn't love them and that life was better without Him.

No matter how many commandments, instructions, or prophets God sent to Israel, their hearts continued to drift away from Him. How could this change? How could this be undone? God had made a promise to rescue His people, but for centuries it seemed as though God would not come through on His promise. But that was not the case.

Throughout the nation's history, God sent messengers called prophets—to Israel. These messengers reminded Israel that their Savior was indeed coming. Not only was He coming, but the specific location and details of His birth were given so that God's people would know what to look for.

Ask someone to read the following passages:

"But you, Bethlehem...though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose risings are from old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2)

You've been stumbling around, like people in a dark room. But into the darkness, a bright Light will shine! It will chase away all the shadows, like sunshine. A little baby will be born. A Royal Son, His mommy will be a young girl who doesn't have a husband. His name will be Emmanuel, which means "God has come to live with us." He is one of King David's children's children's children. The Prince of Peace. Yes, Someone is going to come and rescue you! But he won't be who anyone expects. (The Jesus Storybook Bible)

A King Unlike Any Other

God made sure His people knew their Savior—their King—was coming. But this King would not look like an ordinary King. He would not live in a palace or command an army. He wouldn't be dressed in royal clothes or command a royal assembly. Rather, this King would come in the most humble of ways. He would come as a servant to lay down His life for His people. Instead of commanding their behavior, this King would come to win their hearts.

In a strange way, this King would be the most anticipated King in history, and yet He would not meet any of the expectations of those who had been waiting for Him. Instead of ascending a political throne, He would be given a crown of thorns and be enthroned on a wooden cross.

This King would come to die—and He would do it because it was the only way to win back the hearts of His people who had been running away from Him for centuries.

It's the Secret Rescue Plan we made—from before the beginning of the world! It's the only way to get you back. . . Yes, the Rescuer will come. Look for him. Watch for him. Wait for him. He will come! I promise. (The Jesus Storybook Bible).

Response

Read the following lines of the hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”:

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

As you bring your devotional time to a close, reflect on the following:

For centuries, God's people expected a King who would help them accomplish their own plans. But the real King—the real Jesus—is a King who came to win back our hearts and transform us from the inside out. This is why He came; this is why we celebrate His arrival. At this time, ask Jesus to speak to your hearts and remind you of who He really is and why He came into the world.

Remember

Remind your family, kids, friend, etc. of the special surprise coming for them next week!

and

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.... Advent Song

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Week 3: The King's Arrival

Background

Four hundred years. That's how long it had been since God spoke to Israel. While they had heard from God's prophets in generations before, God was not speaking to them anymore. Four hundred years of silence.

No message. No prophet. Only the promises God had given His people for centuries and a question that lurked in everyone's mind: when will God fulfill His promise to rescue us? What they didn't know was their King was fast approaching and would make his entrance in a most unexpected way.

Ask someone to read the following passage:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.

(Luke 1:26–33)

The Promise Fulfilled

What had been promised, anticipated, and foretold for centuries was finally about to happen! Israel's King was about to arrive. God was about to come through on His promise. The Savior of the world was about to be born.

Ask someone to read the following passage:

Now, Mary and Joseph had to take a trip to Bethlehem, the town King David was from. But when they reached the little town, they found every room was full. Every bed was taken...They couldn't find anywhere except an old tumbledown stable.

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...Mary and Joseph wrapped him up to keep him warm. They made a soft bed of straw and used the animals feeding trough as his cradle. And they gazed in wonder at God's Great Gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Mary and Joseph named him Jesus, "Emmanuel"—which means, "God has come to live with us." Because, of course, he had.

(Jesus Storybook Bible)

On this evening in Bethlehem, God broke the silence and fulfilled the promise He made to Adam and Eve centuries before. He had finally come to rescue His people and destroy the work of the serpent. At last, God had come to bring us back into that beautiful relationship we were always designed to enjoy.

Response: Looking Back and Looking Ahead

As God's people living two-thousand years after the Advent of Jesus, it's critical that we never move past this simple story. While it can easily become familiar to us, this story is nothing less than the glorious story of God coming to save the world. To help us remember, we must continually practice two things: looking back and looking ahead.

In looking back, we remember what Jesus has done for us and how lost we would be if He hadn't fulfilled His promises to us. We look back on a God who moved heaven and earth to come near to us and restore us to a relationship wrapped in His amazing love.

But, we don't just look back. We also look ahead. This world is still a broken place, awaiting its final redemption. And so, we look ahead—to the second Advent of Jesus when He will come again and make all things new.

Our King has come and He is coming again! Until that second Advent dawns, we celebrate the first—that first Advent when our King stepped off His throne and entered into our broken world. Our King is a King who keeps His promises and who calls us to Himself. This King is Jesus—and He loves us more than we could ever imagine.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

*O come, Thou Day-Spring
Come and cheer
Our Spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel*



O Come, O Come Emmanuel (He Has Come)

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, Thou Day-Spring
Come and cheer
Our Spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

He Has come, He Has Come. (4x)

*He Has Come Emmanuel
God with us Always. (4x)*

*Rejoice, Rejoice, The Promised One is Here
God's love brought near to us. (2x)*

*Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
And be yourself our King of Peace.*

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