



ADVENT
DEVOTIONAL
2012

WHAT IS ADVENT?

In its simplest definition, the word “advent” means “coming.”

During the season of Advent, we take time to give special attention to the way in which the Lord came into our world. Our Redeemer humbled Himself, took on human flesh, and was born in a barn, wrapped in rags, and greeted by livestock and peasant workers. It was a quiet and peaceful beginning to the transformation of our world. In the book of Revelation, we see this story from a spiritual perspective, and we see that this coming was accompanied by the thunder of a war cry from heaven and that the whole of creation was stirred by this cosmic act.

Some of us have dramatic conversion stories, where God thundered into our lives. For others of us, it was quieter, more humble. For some of us, the Gospel was the aroma of the homes we were raised in, while others first encountered it like the unfamiliar smells of a stranger’s kitchen. Whatever the case, we each have our story and we can each see the diverse ways in which we came to hear the Good News as reflections of the way it was anticipated, prophesied, and longed for throughout the Scriptures.

During this season, let us take a journey together into the Scriptures. Let us ask the Lord to give us a new taste of the anticipation for Christ’s coming, both in remembering the longing of our hearts for salvation just as Israel longed for the Messiah, and in remembering that Jesus will return once and for all, to raise the dead and restore perfectly God’s order to a new Heaven and a new Earth.

USING THIS DEVOTIONAL

This devotional is intended to be a guide to lead us through the Advent season. It contains four weeks' worth of selected Scripture with reflections and guided prayers for each week. Our belief is that the Word of God is living and active and as we dwell on Scripture and invite God's Spirit to speak to our hearts through it, He will.

The Gospel is possible because God came and made his dwelling among us—Jesus was born. In the four weeks leading up to the celebration of that birth, we wish to prepare our hearts and minds by reading and reflecting each day. The Scripture selections are intentionally short, inviting us to immerse ourselves rather than stretching ourselves too broadly, as we take our time anticipating and considering the coming of Christ.

Each week has a theme to progress us through four stages of anticipating and rightly responding to the coming of Immanuel—God with us. This Advent we want to truly hear the good news of great joy, believe in Christ's coming, worship our Savior, and proclaim His presence to the world. It is our prayer that this reading guide will assist you in anticipating well this season.

LONGING | WEEK 1 [December 2-8]

SCRIPTURE

[1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” [2] And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” [4] But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

—*Genesis 3:1-7*

[81] My soul longs for your salvation;
I hope in your word.

[82] My eyes long for your promise;
I ask, “When will you comfort me?”

[83] For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

[84] How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge those who persecute me?

—*Psalms 119:81-84*

REFLECTION

Though it may seem odd, the story of Christmas begins to unfold with the sin of Adam and Eve. God had given Adam and Eve full dominion over the earth and full relationship with Himself, but they chose to worship themselves instead and ushered sin into creation. This Fall from what was has instilled in us a longing—a longing for a better world.

What we are truly longing for is to worship our Creator. However, we can't on our own, so we wrestle with the pains and troubles of this world, trying to orient our worship to what satisfies. The Good News is that the beginning of this Advent story points to the end of our story—God's redemption of His people through the new Adam, Jesus.

Longing turned to salvation because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice; the great exile of the Fall had no power and death was conquered. Now, standing at the gate of the Garden, it is Jesus who wields fire and sword in judgment and blessing. It is only through faith in the Son that we can once again walk and talk with the Father in the "cool of the day."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In what ways am I worshiping myself?

In what ways do I long?

Where do I seek satisfaction?

Where can I find *true* satisfaction?

PRAYER

Merciful God, we confess that in our longing, we have worshiped the idols of this world instead of worshiping You, the true God.

We realize the sin in our own hearts and the destruction that it brings to the world around us.

We ask for Your forgiveness and mercy and that, in Your grace, You would restore our broken hearts and lives.

We celebrate as we remember the birth of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior.

We rejoice because He alone has provided relief to the longing in our hearts by freeing us from our sin.

Praise be to God!

CHAOS | WEEK 2 [December 9-15]

SCRIPTURE

[6] My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me.
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.

[7] The more they increased,
the more they sinned against me;
I will change their glory into shame.

—Hosea 4:6-7

[1] Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;
[2] but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.
[3] For your hands are defiled with blood
and your fingers with iniquity;
your lips have spoken lies;
your tongue mutters wickedness.

—Isaiah 59:1-3

REFLECTION

Last week we reflected on the longing in the hearts of all humanity. This longing gives way to chaos in our lives. Long ago the prophets of God predicted the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the blessed Savior. There was a general excitement about a coming King that would free the people of Israel from oppression. However, there was chaos and confusion about how this King would come and how He would free them!

Hosea comes to a heavy realization that life is chaotic and humanity needs to commit to God. He pleads with Israel passionately with warnings and promises that their only hope of escaping the chaos is turning to God. Isaiah is making the same plea to us. We are reminded that God's salvation is close at hand, but the chaos in our hearts pushes us far from Him.

As the birth of Jesus and the surrounding events began to unfold, there continued to be this chaos. Some people were looking for a royal king—a conquering king who would free them from the Roman oppression—and they were very confused by the announcement of Jesus' birth in a dirty manger among animals. Joseph and Mary, Jesus' earthly parents, were confused by the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit while Mary was yet a virgin. Nothing was as expected.

Today, we see this chaos in our own lives. We don't understand why things happen the way they do or why things don't turn out as we had hoped. We look for peace in the things around us, in our possessions, and in our relationships, but end up much more confused. Then as we approach Jesus and His Gospel, we see this chaos even more as we see the sin and struggles in our own hearts.

In the midst of such chaos, we must cling to the biblical truth that Jesus is the king of peace. Only He can bring a perfect peace to those who submit to His lordship and rest in Him.

The cure to the rebellion in our hearts and to the chaos in our world is Jesus. Chaos becomes salvation when we put our hope in Jesus as the Christ, the Savior of the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Where is there chaos in your life?

What have you been longing for instead of Jesus that has caused this chaos?

Do you see how hope in Christ can bring peace to your own chaos?

PRAYER

Above the clamor of the chaos in our hearts and lives, Your Word of peace resounds.

Grant Your people a peaceful spirit to joyfully proclaim the Good News of Jesus in the hour in which we live.

Hasten the advent of that day when all chaos and hopelessness will be banished, our deeds of darkness and sin will be cast off, and all Your peace and justice will be made known to all!

HOPE | WEEK 3 [December 16-22]

SCRIPTURE

- [8] “Oh that I might have my request,
and that God would fulfill my hope,
[9] that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!
[10] This would be my comfort;
I would even exult in pain unsparing,
for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.
[11] What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should be patient?
[12] Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze?
[13] Have I any help in me,
when resource is driven from me?

—*Job 6:8-13*

[12] remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility

—*Ephesians 2:12-14*

[10] 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. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

—*Luke 2:10-14*

REFLECTION

The word “hope” in ordinary English vocabulary is generally distinguished from certainty. We would say, “I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I hope it happens.”

When you read the word “hope” in the Bible (like in 1 Peter 1:13: “set your *hope* fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”), hope is not wishful thinking. It’s not, “I don’t know if it’s going to happen, but I hope it happens.” That’s absolutely not what is meant by Christian hope.

Christian hope is when God has promised that something is going to happen and you put your trust in that promise. Christian hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will come to pass.

—*John Piper*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is your hope?

Does your weakness (like Job's) drive you to seek your hope in God?

Do you trust in the certainty of your hope in Jesus?

PRAYER

Merciful God, when we put our hope in the things of this world, forgive us.

We confess our sinfulness and that we have ignored the Christ whom You sent to be among us, to be in us, and to be our hope!

But we can rejoice because of the hope that we have in Your Son, Jesus Christ.

When the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, so that we may have peace with God and the hope of eternal life.

Praise be to God!

SALVATION | WEEK 4 [December 23-29]

SCRIPTURE

[15] The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

—1 Timothy 1:15

[10] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

—Luke 19:10

[21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

—Matthew 1:21

REFLECTION

The longing in our hearts, the chaos in our lives, and the hope we have in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, brings salvation! Swirling around this event-driven holiday, we can easily forget the simplicity that Jesus Christ was born to save sinners like you and I. But this is the very reason He came.

He did not come to give us an agenda for politics, social action or even comfort. Jesus gives satisfaction to our longing hearts. He gives peace to the chaos all around us. He gives hope to those who have none. He gives salvation!

The prophet Isaiah wrote long ago: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shone.” (*Isaiah 9:2*)

We rejoice because this Light that shined into the darkness is Jesus Christ! The Messiah has come to fill the longing, to calm the chaos, and to be our hope! He who existed from the beginning has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ and will never be defeated!

What should our response be to this Light, this Messiah, this Savior? The magnitude of what He has done is deserving of incredible honor and adoration. This time of celebrating Christmas should be filled with intense adoration for Jesus Christ. There is a Light in this dark world. We can truly have peace in times of turmoil. We can have hope when things seem lost. The longing in our hearts for something more can be satisfied. This happens when we see Jesus for who He really is, the Son of God, when we trust Him completely with our lives, and when we turn to Him in repentance.

Jesus Christ saves sinners!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How can you adore Jesus above all this Christmas?

PRAYER

Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward those he favors. For unto us is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. He is Jesus, Son of the living God, splendor of the Father, eternal light.

Praise be to God!



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