

A Guide to Advent



How to Use This Guide

This guide is intended to be a way of connecting further with our Lord Jesus Christ during this year's Advent season. Reflect on each week's Scripture readings and questions. Use it with or instead of your everyday devotions, perhaps with a journal and extended prayer. You also may consider going through this guide with others.

Preparation for Advent

Advent is a derivative of the Latin word for “coming.” Its observance is traced to the 6th century and focuses on the coming of the Lord, not only at His birth but also His second coming. It is a season of anticipation in which we prepare for Christ to live with us, a time to make our hearts ready to receive Him.

Preparation in the First Week

The Christian season of Advent is right at the time as our Western culture begins many Christmas preparations. It is a busy time, and our heads are filled with details to remember. And, it is a time of emotional complexity that is part of this holiday season - with all of the expectations and challenges of family and relationships: who we want to be with and who we struggle to be with. So, our hearts are a bit tender, if not completely defended from experiencing anything deeply.

Personal preparation for Advent is as simple as this: coming to know where I need a Savior is how I can prepare for Advent. I am preparing to listen to the promises, listen to these rich texts announcing the liberation I can truly long for. When my heart is open, when my hands are open, when my mouth is open and ready to ask for freedom, healing and peace, then I am ready to begin Advent.

Read Psalm 130:5-6

- *How do you long for Emmanuel? How do you sense that longing within you? Where is God inviting you to trust Him during this Advent?*

Read Isaiah 35:1-10

- *Where is this passage true in your life? How is God calling you to live this passage out during this Advent?*

Other things to Know As You Celebrate

In the church years there are colors associated with each season. These colors are symbolic reminders of aspects of that particular season. Traditionally, **the primary color of Advent is purple**. This color is the color of royalty (Advent: the coming of the king). Purple is also the color of penitence and fasting and is used again in the church year during the Lenten season, a season of preparation for Holy Week (the week before Easter). Thus, **the use of purple in both of these seasons points to the inescapable connection between Jesus' birth and death**. In a very real sense, the moment Jesus is gently laid in the manger Jesus is also being nailed to a cross. The incarnation, the nativity and the crucifixion are one event.

The Wreath

The Advent wreath is a circular evergreen wreath with five candles, four around the wreath and one in the center. The candle in the center is white and referred to as the Christ candle. It is lit on Christmas Eve. Of the four remaining candles, three are purple and one is pink. The pink candle is lighted on the third week of Advent and speaks of rejoicing/joy because it is now over half way to the coming of the baby Jesus. Each week a candle is lighted and often a short meditation or focus is given. With each successive week the candle from the previous weeks and the new candle are lit, so that on Christmas Eve all four candles are lit as well as the white Christ candle in the center of the Advent wreath. On Christmas Day, the old greens are replaced with new ones and the four outside candles are replaced with 4 new white candles. Then all five candles are lit, symbolizing the presence of Immanuel, God is with us.

There is much symbolism in the wreath, the use of evergreens (renewal, eternal life), the use of the wreath (a circle speaking of the eternity of God, without beginning or end), the use of candles (Jesus is the light of the world), and the white Christ candle (the sinless perfection of Jesus) and so on.

As we begin Advent, we light one candle in the midst of all the darkness in our lives and in the world. It symbolizes our longing, our desire, our hope. Three "advents" or "comings" shape our desire. We want to be renewed in a sense that Jesus came to save us from our sin and death. We want to experience his coming to us now, in our everyday lives, to help us live our lives with meaning and purpose. And we want to prepare for his coming to meet us at the end of our lives on this earth. As we continue to prepare for Advent, let us pray this prayer:

My brother, Jesus. It happens every year. I think that this will be the year that I have a reflective Advent. I look forward to Sunday and this new season, Jesus. But all around me are the signs rushing me to Christmas and some kind of celebration that equates spending with love.

I need your help. I want to slow my world down. This year, more than ever, I need Advent, these weeks of reflection and longing for hope in the darkness.

Jesus, this year, help me to have that longing. Help me to feel it in my heart and be aware of the hunger and thirst in my own soul. Deep down, I know there is something missing in my life, but I can't quite reach for it. I can't get what is missing.

I know it is about you, Jesus. You are not missing from my life, but I might be missing the awareness of all of the places you are present there.

Be with me, my dear friend. Guide me in these weeks to what you want to show me this Advent. Help me to be vulnerable enough to ask you to lead me to the place of my own weakness, the very place where I will find you the most deeply embedded in my heart, loving me without limits.

The First Week of Advent



As we start this first week of Advent, we begin with our longing, our desire and our hope. When we wake up, each day this week, we could light that candle, just by taking a few moments to focus. We could pause for a minute

at the side of our bed, or while putting on our slippers or our robe, and light an *inner* candle. Who among us doesn't have time to pause for a moment? We could each find our own way to pray something like this:

"Lord, the light I choose to let into my life today is based on my trust in you. It is a weak flame, but I so much desire that it dispel a bit more darkness today. Today, I just want to taste the longing I have for you as I go to the meeting this morning, carry out the responsibilities of my work, face the frustration of some difficult relationships. Let this candle be my reminder today of my hope in your coming."

Consider using the verses in this passage as places of further meditation throughout the week.

Lighting of the First Candle

[The following passages can be read in preparation of lighting the first candle]

Isaiah 40:1-11 (This passage looks ahead to the coming of the Lord, who will care for his people like a shepherd.)

Revelation 7:9-17 (Like God's people before the coming of Christ, we also look ahead to the time when Christ, who is both the Lamb and our Shepherd, will finish his work and "God will wipe away every tear" from our eyes.)

Lighting of the Candle

[As someone lights the first candle, the following should be read or paraphrased.]

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we also look forward with hope to the coming of the Shepherd. The purple color of the candle reminds us of the seriousness of our hope.

Prayer of Hope

[To be read or paraphrased.]

Dear God, as we light this candle, we hope for your coming as our Good Shepherd. Please gather us in your arms, feed us with spiritual food, wipe away every tear from our eyes, and "let your face shine, that we may be saved". Come, our Shepherd! Amen.

Closing Song

[To be sung to the tune of "O come let us adore him" from "O Come All Ye Faithful."]

O come to us, our Shepherd, (3x)
Christ the Lord!

***Come, Lord Jesus! Come and visit your people.
We await your coming. Come, O Lord.***

The Second Week of Advent

This week, we remember the Meaning of Advent. Advent means "coming" or "visit". In the Christian season of Advent we prepare for the "advent" of Christ at Christmas. Our preparation includes many things.

We remember Israel's hope for the coming of God's Messiah to save, to forgive, and to restore them. We remember our hope for the second coming of Jesus. We remember our need for a Savior to save us from our sins. We prepare to welcome Christ at Christmas into our world . . . and into our hearts.

By lighting one candle each week of Advent, we help ourselves to get ready for the birth of Jesus. Last week we lit a candle that signified our waiting for God our Shepherd. Today we focus on the coming of Christ who brings forgiveness from our sins. This week's candle represents God's love for us that leads to His forgiveness of our sins. Consider using the verses in this passage as places of further meditation throughout the week.

Prayer for God's Help

Dear God, thank you for this season of Advent that helps us to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas. As we read the Bible and light a candle, may excitement for Christ's coming burn in our hearts. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 130:1-8 (In this psalm we join the psalmist in crying out for God's forgiveness.)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (God promises to make a new covenant with us, in which our sins will be forgiven and forgotten.)

Luke 1:68-79 (When an angel appears to Zechariah in the temple and tells him that his wife will give birth to a son, the old man doesn't believe the angel. As a result, Zechariah is

unable to speak for many months, until immediately after the birth of his son John (the Baptist). Right after the birth, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks the prophecy that we will read.)

Lighting of the Candle

[As someone lights the second candle, the following should be read or paraphrased.]

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we also need a Savior who will forgive our sins. The purple color reminds us of the seriousness of our sin and our great need for God's forgiveness.

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we recognize our sin and our need for a savior. We wait for your forgiveness in Christ. We long to be purified so that we might present ourselves to you in righteousness. Come, Our Savior! Amen!

Closing Song

[To be sung to the tune of "O come let us adore him" from "O Come All Ye Faithful."]

O come to us, forgive us,
O come to us, forgive us,
O come to us, forgive us,
Christ the Lord!



The Third Week of Advent

In this third week of Advent, we celebrate joy. Joy that Christ is coming. Joy that Advent is halfway over and Christ's arrival is all the more near. Joy that a plan of salvation has been made for us. Joy that we are becoming the New Creation Jesus wants us to be. And Joy that the second coming of Jesus is near.

As you celebrate this third week, consider the joy of this past year, the ways God has moved in your life and been an "ever-present help in times of trouble" (Psalm 46). Today as we light the pink candle, signifying that there is now more light than dark, thank the Lord for His goodness to you and your family and for what He wants to do in your life. Consider using the verses in this passage as places of further meditation throughout the week.

Prayer for God's Help

Dear God, thank you for this season of Advent that helps us to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas. As we read the Bible and light a candle, may excitement for Christ's coming burn in our hearts. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 126:1-6 (This psalm celebrates God's restoration of Israel -- and it cries out to God for future restoration.)

Zephaniah 3:14-20 (Through the prophet Zephaniah God looks ahead to the time when he will renew and heal his people. It will be a day of great rejoicing, both for them and for God!)

Philippians 4:4-7 (We also rejoice in the Lord, in part because we know that "the Lord is near." This means, not only that God is with us right now, but that Christ is coming soon.)

Lighting of the Candle

[As someone lights the pink candle, the following should be read or paraphrased.]

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we know that God has come in Christ and that Christ will come again. We rejoice in God's work in history and in the future. The pink color means joy!

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we rejoice. We know how the first act of the story ended - with the birth of Jesus the Messiah. And we know that he will come again in glory. So even though the story isn't over, we rejoice in our hope. We wait for you, rejoicing! Amen!

Closing Song

[To be sung to the tune of "O come let us adore him" from "O Come All Ye Faithful."]

We wait for you, rejoicing (3x),
Christ the Lord!



The Fourth Week of Advent

In this week of Advent, we reflect on peace. When the angels appeared to the shepherds watching their flocks by night, they proclaimed "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all who please Him!" (Luke 2:14). Advent is a time of great security because of what the Lord has done.

Consider this week how you have that security—is it there? Do you rely on it in times of need? What message bolsters this security? Consider using the verses below as places of further meditation throughout the week.

Prayer for God's Help

Dear God, thank you for this season of Advent that helps us to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas. As we read the Bible and light a candle, may excitement for Christ's coming burn in our hearts. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-37, 46-52 (This psalm celebrates God's covenant with David and with the descendants of David. He even calls God "my Father" (vs. 26). But the psalmist composed this psalm at a time when God's blessing upon Israel seemed very far away. He calls upon the Lord to remember his covenant to David.)

Isaiah 9:1-7 (Deliverance will come for God's people through the "son" who is given to them. He will sit on the throne of David and his kingdom will last forever.)

Luke 1:26-38 (The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is pregnant and will give birth to a son. Her son will also be "the Son of the Most High" and will sit on the throne of David. He will be the reigning Son of David and the divine Son of God!)

Lighting of the Candle

[As someone lights the final candle, the following should be read or paraphrased.]

We light this candle because we look forward with eagerness to the birth of a child, the son of Mary and the Son of God! The purple color reminds us of how serious we are in looking forward to the Son's birth.

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we look ahead with hope to the birth of your Son -- the Son of David, the son of Mary. May we be prepared to welcome him with open arms and open hearts. O come now, Son of David! Amen!

Closing Song

[To be sung to the tune of "O come let us adore him" from "O Come All Ye Faithful."]

O come now, Son of David (3x)
Christ the Lord!



Christmas Day

On Christmas Day, we light the center white candle and celebrate He Whose day this is—Jesus. As you light this candle today among family and friends, remember the essence of the Christmas story—that God reached into our humanity to bring to glory those who could not do so on their own. Those members of humanity are us. Rejoice in this great fact that today we celebrate the birth of Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Good Shepherd, Jesus who forgives our sins, Jesus who will come again, Jesus the son of Mary, the Son of David, and the very Son of God!

Take a few moments today to reflect on what is stirring within you about today. Consider what is most important about the coming of Christ in your life. Take a few moments and sit with God and tell Him what is moving in you. Consider using the verses in this passage as places of further meditation throughout the week ahead.

Prayer for God's Help

Dear God, as we light the center candle today, may we celebrate with full joy the birth of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen!

Scripture Readings

Micah 5:1-5 (God promises through the prophet Micah that his future rule will come from Bethlehem, even though this town is, indeed, a "little town" and quite insignificant.)

Luke 2:1-20 (Jesus the Messiah is born in Bethlehem!)

Psalms 145 (Let us join the psalmist in offering praise to God for his mighty works!)

Lighting of the Candle

[As someone lights the center, white candle, the following

should be read or paraphrased.]

We light this candle with great joy and celebration, because Christ is born in Bethlehem. God's Son has come into the world to be our Savior!

Prayer of Hope

Dear God, as we light this candle, we rejoice in the birth of your Son. May we worship him, welcome him, and make room for him in our hearts. O come, let us adore him! Amen!

Closing Song

O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!



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