

# Advent Guide

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## Introduction

*You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.*

**1 Peter 1:8-13**

It's easy to get lost in the busyness of the Christmas season, taken away by the consumer-driven "promises" of our culture and focusing on the shadow rather than the substance—Christ. God promised to send the Savior, and he faithfully fulfilled that promise. Amid the fleeting things that fail to save us and fill us, God comes through on his promises. This is the theme of Advent, formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival."

Advent is a season of celebration in which we get to look back on Jesus's first arrival (when he came in humility) and expectantly await his second arrival (when he will come in glory). It is a season for thoughtful remembrance and rejoicing, coupled with anticipation and forward-looking faith. Our King is returning. Jesus Christ has come to us once and will come to us again. This is the hope of the Church that he purchased with his blood. His return is the eager expectation and desire of his people; we look forward to it with joy because above all else, he alone is our treasure!

## History & Traditions

The Advent season begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues through Christmas Day. There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on both tradition and background.

One popular convention is to mark the season's progression with an Advent wreath, which is made up of five candles. This symbol is borrowed from the emphasis throughout Scripture that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). Each week a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The wreath shows the Bible's theme of ever-increasing light penetrating the darkness, a wonderful picture of the gospel. Regardless of tradition, Advent is a significant opportunity for believers to remember God's promise to send Jesus, who would overcome sin and death forever. God promised a Savior, and he kept that promise perfectly.

*Amid the fleeting things that fail to save us and fill us, God comes through on his promises.*

## Using This Guide

This Advent guide will cover five weeks of material walking you through the narrative of Jesus' birth, beginning in the Garden of Eden with God's promise for a Savior and ending with the eager anticipation of Jesus' promised return. Throughout, we see how God continually shows unmistakable faithfulness to his people, especially by sending the promised rescuer. We will see his love for the lowly and outcast and marvel at his heart to see all nations come and worship his son.

Even if you are already familiar with the Advent narrative, don't rush past what God has for you in this season. For some, this may be the first time to consider all that God has said through the birth of his son. For others, it will be an opportunity to rediscover the way God intimately works in the details of life for his glory and the good of man. And for us all may this season be marked by hope, expectation, remembrance, and worship. We have been given so much to celebrate in Christ. Within this Advent guide is both an individual and a family section for each week. Adults may use the individual portion of the guide for personal or devotional use, while those with children may choose to use it as an opportunity to prepare for leading their household in the family portion. Our hope is that you would use this guide to connect with the true meaning of Christmas—that our King has come, and he is coming again!

### A Note for Families

Advent is an opportunity to pause and reflect on Jesus' birth—but for most, the Christmas season is filled to the brim with activities and obligations. Before the calendar begins to fill up, take the time to consider what you truly want for your family in this season. Make a plan and stick to it, so that a season intended for remembrance and celebration doesn't get overshadowed by things of lesser importance.

To help toward that end, we have provided a family portion each week that will help you create intentional time to talk about Jesus. If you choose to use the Advent wreath, put it in a special, visible place in the house to serve as a reminder of Jesus' coming. There is also a song each week for your family to sing or listen to together.

The family portions of the guide were written with preschool and elementary-aged children in mind. If you have older children, consider having each person work through the "On Your Own" section in place of reading the family commentary, and then come together to talk about what you learned.

*Our King has come—and he is coming again!*

## Week One: Individual

### *The Promise of a Savior*

*And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.*

**Genesis 3:15**

#### **Advent in the Beginning**

Many of us grew up with the story of Advent beginning in a stable. But, really, the story begins in a garden, a long time before the night of Christ's birth.

When God created the world, all things were just as they should be. Creation functioned in perfect order and seamless harmony. Man walked in unbroken relationship with God, fully known and unafraid. But all that changed in an instant when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's good instruction. They took of the fruit, ate, and sin entered the world. Fellowship broken. Peace shattered. Creation thrown into chaos. Darkness, depravity, fear, shame, and selfishness flooded the human heart, separating man from God. Creation was fractured.

But in that moment, in the midst of the darkness, God spoke a word of hope: a Savior would come, born of a woman, to defeat that enemy of sin and restore God's people to himself.

Scholars call Genesis 3:15 the "proto euangelion"—the first announcement of the gospel. From the first moment of our need for rescue, God's promise was there. God promised that sin would not have the final say and the enemy's schemes would not prevail.

#### **Shadows, Hints, and Whispers of His Coming**

Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to his people about this promise and gave them things to watch for in order to recognize the Savior's coming. God revealed that the Messiah would be born in the line of David (Isa. 9:6-7), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and in the town of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). He would be a Man of Sorrows—crushed, despised, and rejected—justifying many through what he suffered (Isa. 53). The promised rescuer would be a light overcoming darkness (Isa. 9:2), a preacher of good news to the poor (Isa. 61), and one walking in the power of the Spirit (Isa. 42:1). There were hints and shadows of him everywhere.

God also reminded his people not to lose heart as they waited for the Savior to come. It's important to remember that God

did not fulfill his promise right away. His people waited a long time. They spoke of the promised rescuer from generation to generation, enduring cycles of war, rebellion, captivity, and restoration. They watched and waited—anxiously, expectantly—for God's faithfulness.

We can all identify with feeling hopeless and helpless, especially when it comes to the weight of sin. Heavy and inescapable, we know its effects with every breath—both our own sin and that of others. Our world is full of evidence that something is wrong and needs to be made right. The reason we celebrate Advent is because the story of the garden doesn't end with man's rebellion. God makes a promise, and, as we'll see in the weeks to come, he keeps it perfectly.

#### **Reflection**

Consider Israel's long wait for the Savior to come. How do you think God's people fought against doubt, discouragement, and the temptation to believe God forgot them?

Are you good at waiting? Why or why not? What makes some promises easier to wait on than others?

God often gives us seasons of waiting to sift and strengthen our faith. If you are in a season of waiting, what might the Lord be teaching you?

How strong is your confidence that God keeps his promises? Explain. Then read 2 Corinthians 1:19-20. How does this passage affect your understanding of God's faithfulness?

#### **Response**

What is one hope you have for yourself, your family, or your community as you begin the Advent season? How will you make that a reality?

Pray for yourself and those around you, asking God to open your eyes and heart to what he has for you this Advent season.

#### **Songs of the Season**

O Come, O Come Emmanuel  
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

*God makes a promise—and he keeps it perfectly.*

## Week One: Family

### *The Promise of a Savior*

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches, and a Bible.

#### Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

#### Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud:

*Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: "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.*

*Jesus Storybook Bible*

*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.*

**Isaiah 9:6**

#### The Promise of a Savior

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no sin, pain, sickness, death or sadness. God created Adam and Eve to live in his perfect world with joy and peace. But Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God. When they sinned, God's perfect world broke.

There was a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. Because God is perfect, he cannot be near sin. So Adam and Eve were separated from God. The punishment for their sin would also be placed on all humans who were born after Adam and Eve. But before Adam and Eve left God's perfect garden, God made a promise. He promised to send a rescuer, someone to save Adam, Eve, and mankind from the punishment of sin. He promised to send Jesus!

God did not send Jesus to rescue his people right away. He waited thousands of years to send the rescuer. During that time, God's people faced many hard things. While they waited, God gave them hints and clues about how Jesus would come, what he would do and what he would be like. These hints were written in the Scriptures to help God's people wait.

During that time, God made other promises to his children and kept those promises. Each time God made and kept a promise, it helped his children trust that he would be faithful to his promise to send Jesus to rescue them from their sins.

Some days, God's children waited patiently for God to keep his promise. Some days, they waited with tears and frustration. Some days, they wondered if God had forgotten his promise. But God continued to whisper it over and over again as his children waited. And one day, when no one was expecting it, Jesus would come.

#### Reflection

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for promising to send Jesus to rescue us from our sins. Thank him for being a God who keeps his promises!

#### Family Activity

Parents, make plans for a fun Christmas activity next week that you know your children will love. Perhaps it's seeing a Christmas play or movie, decorating cookies together, or seeing Christmas lights.

At the end of your family Advent time, tell your kids that you will do something special together to celebrate Advent—something they will love—but don't tell them what or when!

As the days go by, remind them of your promise and give them hints as to what it might be. Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of God's promise to send a rescuer and the anticipation God's people felt as they waited.

#### Songs of the Season

As a family, sing/listen to "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and consider the great promises that God has made true in giving us Jesus.

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

*Each time God made and kept a promise, it helped his children trust that he would be faithful to his promise, that he would send Jesus to rescue them from their sins.*

## Week Two: Individual

### *The Promise Perfectly Kept: The Birth of Jesus*

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

**Micah 5:2**

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 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 cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

**Luke 2:1-7**

#### He Came Just as He Said He Would

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the promised Savior, telling the people how to recognize his coming and reminding them that God had not forgotten. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the son of a virgin according to the line of David, a King to rule and usher in an era of peace like never before. Israel watched and waited, filled with longing and expectation for this promised rescuer.

Four hundred and fifty years of silence had passed since the final words of the prophets. And then, on an unassuming night, he came—just as he said he would. A young, pregnant virgin woman named Mary journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem alongside her fiancé Joseph to be counted for Caesar’s census. The couple entered the sleepy Judean town and took refuge in the only place available: a stable. And when the time came, Mary gave birth to her firstborn: a son. She wrapped him in cloths, laid him in a manger and gave him the name Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins. And just like that, a whisper in the Bethlehem night, a child was born, a son was given.

This newborn’s cry pierced the midnight sky like a trumpet heralding sin’s demise and the defeat of death forever for all who would believe. The ancient of days stepped into time and wrapped himself in the frailty of human skin. He came, full of

pity, compassion and power, to rescue those lost in darkness and carry them into the kingdom of everlasting light. He came—just as he said he would, to do what we never could.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the prophets promised concerning the Messiah. We understand that our Lord has done just what he said he would do, at exactly the right time. Surely he who has been perfectly faithful to his promises in the past will be faithful to all his promises to come. Let Advent be a time to reflect on God’s faithfulness to do exactly what he has said.

OT Promise	NT Fulfillment
Genesis 3:15	Rom. 5:6-8; Gal. 4:4-7; Col. 2:13-15
Isaiah 9:2	Matt. 4:12-17; John 1:4-5, 12:46
Isaiah 53:10-11	Romans 5:1-2
Isaiah 53:4	Matthew 8:14-17

#### Reflection

Consider the prophecies from Isaiah 9:1-7 and Micah 5:2. How do you see these fulfilled in Jesus’ birth?

What promises has God already fulfilled in your life? How do you keep the memory of his faithfulness fresh?

What promises of God are you waiting to see fulfilled? How does the perfect fulfillment of God’s promise to send the Messiah encourage your confidence in his faithfulness?

#### Response

As you make your list of people to buy gifts for, include someone who would never expect to receive a gift from you. Think of the delight you feel in blessing them and consider the love in God’s heart as he sent his son to die for sinners.

In prayer, thank God for the perfect fulfillment of his promise through Jesus. Confess places where your confidence in his faithfulness is weak and ask him for increased trust, belief, and hope.

#### Songs of the Season

O Holy Night  
Silent Night  
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

*Describe a time when you looked forward to an event for a long time.  
What emotions did you feel as you waited?*

## Week Two: Family

### *The Promise Perfectly Kept: The Birth of Jesus*

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches, and a Bible.

#### **Lighting of the Advent Candle**

Have one member of the family light last week's candle and a second candle.

#### **Scripture Reading**

Have one person read the following passages out loud:

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

Luke 2:3-7

*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. His baby son.*

*Jesus Storybook Bible*

#### **The Promise Perfectly Kept**

Do you remember the promise we talked about last week? God's promise to send a rescuer? His promise to send Jesus? Well, he kept his promise! Jesus came, just like God said he would.

After thousands of years of waiting, on an ordinary night, Jesus came. God gave his people hints and clues about how Jesus would come. He told them that Jesus would come from Bethlehem, be a ruler and bring peace. Many expected a soldier; some expected a politician. No one expected a baby. But that's how Jesus came.

Mary and Joseph lived in a town called Nazareth. One day, the king gave an order that everyone was to go back to their hometown to be counted for something called a census. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way to the town of Bethlehem, where Joseph's family was from. When they got to Bethlehem,

the town was full of other travelers, and there was nowhere for Mary and Joseph to stay. So they found a stable to sleep in. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and Jesus, the Savior, was born.

Jesus, the King of heaven, left his perfect home to be born a baby to a young man and woman. He became fragile and helpless. His room that night was a stable—dirty, smelly, and full of noisy animals. His bed was not kingly and luxurious; it was a feed box that animals ate out of. Mary had to wipe old, rotten food out of the manger and cover it with poky straw before she laid her tiny baby in it.

But everything that happened that night was exactly what God had planned and promised. Jesus came, just like God said he would. God had kept his promise! Jesus had come to save sinners!

The events of that night, in that stable in the little town of Bethlehem, would change the world forever.

#### **Reflection**

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending Jesus to be born as a baby who would save us from our sins.

#### **Family Activity**

This week, keep the promise you made to your family during last week's family Advent time. Talk about how you fulfilled the hints and clues you gave them. Discuss the experience of waiting: What was it like to wonder when and how the promise would be kept? What was it like to finally experience what you had been waiting and hoping for? Remember together God's faithfulness in keeping his promise to send a Savior. It happened just as he said it would.

#### **Songs of the Season**

As a family, sing or listen to "Away in a Manger":

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed*

*The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head. The stars in the sky looked down where he lay, The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.*

*Everything that happened was exactly what God had planned and promised.  
God had kept his promise by sending Jesus!*

## Week Three: Individual

### *Tell of His Coming: The Shepherds and Angels*

*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." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

*When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

**Luke 2:8-20**

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

**Romans 10:14-15**

#### **Tell of His Coming**

We love hearing good news, especially when we're the first to know. There's a big difference between getting a phone call from your best friend about their pregnancy, engagement, or new job and finding out about it on Facebook. We cherish being invited to participate in the lives of the people we love instead of simply being spectators.

Today the ability to share exciting news with others is quick and easy. With one tweet, post, hashtag, or group text, we

can communicate with the masses. But things were obviously very different in the time Jesus was born. When something important happened, such as the birth of a child, heralds often spread that news. Families welcoming new babies, if they had the means to do so, would hire someone to go throughout the community and announce their happy news. Mary and Joseph, of humble means, did not have the ability to do this. But God himself provided a company of heavenly heralds to proclaim the birth of his one and only son.

Imagine the scene: shepherds on the midnight watch, ears and eyes open for signs of danger, sheep bleating in the background. And then, out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord, the glory of God and news of a promise perfectly kept. It is amazing that God chose this group of men as the first to hear the good news. In the time of Jesus' birth, people regarded shepherds as liars and thieves. Because they were nomadic, moving from place to place to graze their flocks, people didn't readily trust them. Yet it was to men such as this that God announced the Messiah's coming. He told them first! Not royalty, not the religious leaders of the day, but shepherds—lowly and insignificant. He invited them into his story and then mobilized them as the very first evangelists.

As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find Mary, Joseph and the savior child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the one through whom salvation would come, they spread the word of all that had taken place.

We are like these men—unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ's birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of his death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into his story, sent out as heralds of both Jesus' first coming and his second. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this good news of great joy—with amazement, belief, and action.

*As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act.*

Cont.

## Week Three: Individual

*Tell of His Coming: The Shepherds and Angels*

### Reflection

How did you first hear the gospel? Who told you, and how did you respond?

Did sharing the news of Jesus' birth feel like a burden or a joy to the shepherds? Why? How do you feel about sharing the gospel? What might help you consistently view it as a joyful calling?

What fears keep you from sharing the news that Jesus has come to save sinners? Look up Colossians 1:3-6. How might the assurance in this passage increase your boldness?

### Response

Write a letter to someone who was instrumental in your coming to faith. Whether or not you can actually send them that letter, communicate how the Lord used them to change your heart and life.

In prayer, praise God for loving the weak, despised, and lowly. Thank him for the person or means he used to share the gospel with you and ask him for the boldness and faith to do the same.

### Songs of the Season

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Angels We Have Heard on High

While Shepherds Kept Their Watch by Night Come Ye Lofty,  
Come Ye Lowly



## Week Three: Family

### *Tell of His Coming: The Shepherds and Angels*

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches, and a Bible.

#### **Lighting of the Advent Candle**

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first two weeks and a third candle.

#### **Scripture Reading**

Have one person read the following passages out loud:

*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."*

**Luke 2:8-12**

*Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud—except it wasn't a cloud, it was angels troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!"*

**Jesus Storybook Bible**

#### **Tell of His Coming**

God kept his promise! The most wonderful moment in all of history had just occurred, yet no one knew about 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. And he began with an unusual group of people.

Kings, queens, and religious leaders were not the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus. Instead, God told the most unimportant of people his good news first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals, thieves, and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the rescuer had come. And the way they heard that good news was nothing short of amazing.

While the shepherds watched their sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the

shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel that appeared to them was no baby with wings and a harp sitting on a cloud, like some stories might describe. No, this angel was a warrior of the Lord. And he shined with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of himself.

The angel told the shepherds not to be afraid. God did what he had promised—he sent Jesus to rescue God's people from their sins. God was making peace between himself and sinners through Jesus.

Upon telling the shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth and how to find him, the angel was joined by thousands of other angels who began singing about the greatness of God. That dark, quiet night sky filled with a beautiful, blinding light and roaring song that left the shepherds forever changed. Once they had heard the news, the shepherds were desperate to go and find Jesus and see the marvelous thing that God had done.

So the shepherds abandoned their sheep and raced to Bethlehem. Once they saw baby Jesus there in the manger, they left the stable and began telling everyone they saw the good news that the savior had come. God used this group of men—men everyone despised—to tell the world that Jesus had come. As Jesus would do throughout His life, God was coming to sinners to show them the way to salvation.

#### **Reflection**

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending angels to share the good news of Jesus' birth to sinners just like us.

#### **Family Activity**

One night this week, go out caroling as a family. As you visit homes of neighbors, friends and family, sing songs of praise about the birth and salvation of Jesus. It might be easiest to start at the home of someone you know who loves Jesus as you do. Sing praises to God and invite them to join you at the next house.

*The angels were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God!  
To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!"*

Cont.

## Week Three: Family

*Tell of His Coming: The Shepherds and Angels*

Make sure you visit at least one home of people who do not love and trust Jesus. Just like God showed grace and love to the lowliest of sinners, share the good news of Jesus' birth with someone who does not know God. Maybe that person will hear the good news and will believe in Jesus.

### Songs of the Season

As a family, sing or listen to "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing":

*Hark the herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled"  
Joyful, all ye nations rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With the angelic host proclaim:  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem"  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Christ by highest heav'n adored  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come  
Offspring of a Virgin's womb  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell  
Jesus, our Emmanuel  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings  
Ris'n with healing in His wings  
Mild He lays His glory by  
Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"*



## Week Four: Individual

### *The Promise for All Peoples: The Journey of the Magi*

*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.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”*

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”*

*After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 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. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

**Matthew 2:1-12**

#### **The Promise for All Peoples**

Magi were men trained in astrology, dream interpretation, and other mysteries. They studied the sky and knew the stars and their significance. The Magi mentioned in Matthew 2 lived in the East (probably near Persia) but we do not know their exact identity and origin.

What we do know is that they were not Jews—they were Gentiles. It is possible that these men heard of the promised Savior from Jews residing in their land during the Babylonian captivity. When they saw the star signifying his birth, they left their home for Jerusalem, embarking on a journey to find the newborn King and worship him.

At least two things are striking about the events that unfold in Matthew 2. The first is that these men were Gentiles. They were not of Israel, not descendants of Abraham. The birth of the promised Messiah shouldn't matter to them. The second is that God was the one who announced the birth of his Son to the Gentile world. God appointed a star to herald the news of

his coming. God set that star in the sight of these Magi. God used that star to lead them to his son so they could worship him as the rightful King.

This scene in the Advent narrative whispers of an incredible mercy—God reveals his son and extends salvation to the nations. Men and women from every people, tribe, and tongue will taste the honey-like sweetness of Jesus' name upon their lips, confessing him as Lord and worshiping him as King.

In the same way God set a star in the sky to lead the Magi to Jesus, he places his children in their neighborhoods, workplaces, PTA meetings, and lecture halls to do the same. You don't have to go overseas to impact the nations. God brings them to our doorstep—refugees, international students, those in search of greater opportunities and freedom. The nations may very well live next door. Being part of God's global purposes may be as simple as reaching out to people he has placed in your everyday life. Or it may be that you go to the ends of the earth and happily herald the good news to those who have never heard it.

The world is big, and the gospel is not an American idea. The gospel has been proclaimed to us too; the mercy of God extended to the Gentiles means that mercy has been extended to us. The story of the Magi stirs our hearts to look beyond our familiar comforts and remember that it is our joyful duty to bring that gospel to all nations. We want to be a part of what God is doing as he continues to draw men, women, and children from all nations to come and worship his Son.

#### **Reflection**

Look up Psalm 86:9. What promise do you see in this verse? What reassurance does the story of the Magi give us about the spreading of the gospel? How should the story challenge us as those who are called to tell the good news?

Look up Ephesians 2:11-17. In this passage, who are “those who were far off”? Are people in foreign countries farther off from the gospel than you were when you first heard it? Explain.

What is the primary means God uses to make disciples of all nations? How can you actively take the gospel to all nations in the upcoming year? List some specific ideas.

#### **Songs of the Season**

Joy to the World

O Come, All Ye Faithful

## Week Four: Family

### *The Promise for All Peoples: The Journey of the Magi*

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches, and a Bible.

#### **Lighting of the Advent Candle**

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first three weeks and a fourth candle.

#### **Scripture Reading**

Have one person read the following passages out loud:

*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."*

**Matthew 2:1-2**

*The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three wise men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the king God had promised David all those years before.*

**Jesus Storybook Bible**

*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.*

**Matthew 2:11-12**

#### **The Promise for All Peoples**

The first people God told about Jesus' birth were the shepherds. He used a spectacular mass of angels to shout from the skies that Jesus had come. But the angels were not alone in proclaiming the good news that night, and the shepherds were not the only people to learn of the rescuer's coming.

That same night, God placed a special star in the sky, a bright body of light that announced the birth of the King. Some men in a faraway country saw this star. These men were called Magi. They were educated men who studied the skies and nature. Most scholars believe these men came from Persia, or modern-day Iran. There was something very special about these men.

Throughout the Bible, God promised to send a rescuer to save the Israelites from their sins. But these Magi were not Israelites. They were Gentiles. That means they were not from Abraham's family and likely did not know and worship God. But that night, God did something that no one expected.

By placing that star in the sky, God showed unbelievable mercy toward all people. In showing the Magi that Jesus, the King of heaven, had been born, God was extending salvation to people of all nations.

When the Magi saw the special star that God had placed in the sky, they left their home country to find Jesus. Their journey took a long time. It may have taken them up to two years after his birth to reach the place where Jesus was! But when the Magi found him, they entered Jesus' home, bowed down, and worshiped the one who had come to save sinners. They then gave Jesus precious, costly gifts.

Throughout the Advent story, we see that God is generous. He sent a company of angels to shout the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, and he put a special star in the sky to guide men from a faraway country to Jesus. He desires that all people know, love, trust, and obey him. And God promises that one day men, women and children from every tribe, tongue, and nation will worship Jesus. God will rescue people from all over the world, and we will worship him as he deserves.

#### **Reflection**

Have one family member say a prayer to praise God and ask Him to show people of all nations the good news that Jesus came to save sinners.

#### **Family Activity**

Spend time this week looking at a map of the world. Play a game where you name a country and your kids try to find it. Talk together about what it would be like to live in a different culture with a different language and customs. Point out places in the world where people aren't free to openly worship Jesus or talk about him.

#### **Songs of the Season**

As a family, sing or listen to "O, Come, All Ye Faithful":

*O come all ye faithful joyful and triumphant*

*Oh come ye O come ye to Bethlehem;*

*Come and behold him born the King of angels;*

*O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

# Christmas Eve

## Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one person light the candles from the first four weeks, remembering together what you've learned about God's faithfulness during Advent. After reading Luke 2:1-20, have another person light the fifth candle—the Christ candle.

## Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passage out loud:

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 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 cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*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." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*

**Luke 2:1-20**

***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"***

## Week Five: Individual

### *The Promise of Jesus' Return*

*"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

**Luke 21:27-28**

*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*

**2 Peter 3:8-14**

#### **The Promise of Jesus' Return**

For many of us, Christmas Day is one of the most important days of the entire year, which is obvious given the intense amount of preparation that often goes into it. We adjust schedules, plans and budgets months in advance. Family members travel in from far away. Decorations are perfectly placed, menus are planned, and gifts are purchased, wrapped, and hidden. There is intentionality, joy, and anticipation; all because this day is significant. And also because we believe it is a reality.

Christmas isn't a pretend day; it's real. We wouldn't go through all the trouble to prepare if we didn't believe Christmas was, in fact, an actual day. We trust it to come on the same date every year. Out of love and expectation, we make every necessary preparation, so that when it becomes our reality, we are ready. We spend months preparing to celebrate and remember Christ's first coming. How much more should we seek to be ready for his second coming? That day, too, is a reality; an

absolute certainty. Unlike Christmas Day, which happens every December 25, only the Father knows the day and hour the Son will return. But he is coming. In the fullness of time, He will split the sky and descend to destroy all wickedness, receive the worship that is rightfully his and usher in a new age—the beginning of unbroken, unending fellowship with him. We should believe in, think about, look to, and prepare for that day.

#### **Once More We Wait**

The day of Jesus' return is certain and coming, but—so far—it is not today. We find ourselves much like the Israelites long ago—waiting. Which begs the question: How then shall we wait?

Peter asks and answers this very question in his second letter. In love, he reminds his readers that, though the days seem long and weary in the waiting, God is not slow in keeping his promise.

He assures them of the absolute reality of the appointed day when Jesus will return. And he then tells them exactly what kinds of lives they are to live in light of this coming day—lives of holiness, godliness, and hopeful expectation.

Peter's exhortations are just as much for us today as they were for the believers he wrote to long ago. We too are living in the days of God's patient mercy. We need to be reminded that really believing in and looking toward the reality of Jesus' return changes the way we live. It reorients our hope and perspective. It creates a sense of urgency and sobriety, as well as giddy anticipation—just like a child who cannot wait for Christmas morning.

Let us, the people of God, be found ready in the waiting. As this Advent season comes to a close, take some time to reflect on how the reality of Jesus' return affects the way you live. May your heart be full and your eyes bright as you hope all things in Christ and look to his coming. Take heart, beloved. It won't be long.

#### **Reflection**

Reread 2 Peter 3:8-14. What stands out to you in this passage and why? What questions does it leave you with?

*Think about the different ways in which you prepare for things in your life. How much time and intentionality do you invest and why? What motivates you toward careful preparation?*

Cont.

## Week Five: Individual

### *The Promise of Jesus' Return*

How does your life reflect your belief that Jesus will return? Is it something you think about and long for? If not, why do you think that is?

What do you think of when you hear or read the words “be diligent”? What does it look like for you to be diligent in pursuing holiness and godliness? In what areas do you need to fight and flee from sin? In what areas do you need to cultivate love for God and love for others?

Look up Romans 8:22-25. Compare it to Revelation 21:1-7. What future birth do we await? How does looking expectantly to the promised return of Jesus affect the way you see your present circumstances?

### Response

One way God's children prepare for Jesus' return is by caring for the poor, vulnerable, and outcast (Matt. 25:31-46). As you look ahead to the new year, think of practical ways you and your family or community can care for the weak in your area.

In prayer, thank God for the reality that Jesus will return and make all things new. Confess any areas of your life—finances, time, relationships, stewardship of your body—where you haven't been diligent in pursuing holiness. Ask the Lord to show you specific ways you can actively await his promised return in the coming year.

### Songs of the Season

Glorious Day

In Christ Alone Look and See

You Hold Me Now



## Week Five: Family

### *The Promise of Jesus' Return*

Set aside 10 minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to send a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches, and a Bible.

#### **Lighting of the Advent Candle**

As a family, light all five candles. Talk about how Jesus, the Light, came into the world to pierce the darkness of sin once, and he will return to do away with it forever.

#### **Scripture Reading**

Have one person read the following passages out loud:

*"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

**Luke 21:27-28**

*"I am going to show you a secret, John," Jesus said, "about when I come back." "Write down what you see so God's children can read it, and wait with happy excitement. I'm on my way... I'll be there soon."*

**Jesus Storybook Bible**

#### **The Promise of Jesus' Return**

God kept his promise! Jesus came, just like God said he would. But God's promises don't end there. Just like God's people waited with eager anticipation for Jesus to come and rescue them from their sins, we are waiting too.

God made us another promise. He promised that Jesus would return to earth. He has already saved us from our sins if we love and trust him. But when he comes the second time, he will save us from all the brokenness that sin has caused in the world.

Just like before, God has given us hints and clues about how and when Jesus will return. And just like before, we wait. Sometimes we wait patiently. Sometimes we wait with tears and frustration because we can't wait to live in a world without any sin. Sometimes we forget and wonder if Jesus really will come back. But God is faithful—even when we are faithless. And Jesus will come back.

This time, Jesus will not come in the middle of the night as a baby. He will not be weak and helpless. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes back, he will ride out of the sky on a horse, carrying a sword. He will do battle with Satan. And he will win. Our rescuer is coming back!

While we wait, we wait with hope. We live lives of joy, peace, and compassion. We strive to be more like Jesus, every day putting sin to death. And we tell others that Jesus came to save sinners in hopes that they will love and trust in him too.

Jesus is coming back. We don't know when, but we know he's coming. Soon. So be ready. Soon we will worship our King, as he deserves, forever. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

#### **Reflection**

Have one family member say a prayer, asking Jesus to come again soon.

#### **Family Activity**

Together, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and talk about what Jesus' return will be like, look like, and sound like. What do you learn from this passage?

Ask your children what questions they have about Jesus' return and if it's something that scares them to think about. Assure them that Jesus' return will usher in a world with no more sin, sickness, sadness, fights, punishment, or having to eat foods they don't like. Even better, those who love and trust Jesus will be with him forever with no separation. We should look to and long for Jesus' return. And while we wait, we should take seriously his command to love him first and most, know his Word, care for the poor, and share the gospel.

#### **Song**

As a family, listen to or watch "God With Us" (featuring Isaac Wimberley) by Folk Angel.

*Just like God fulfilled his promise to send Jesus the first time,  
he will fulfill his promise to send Jesus back again.*