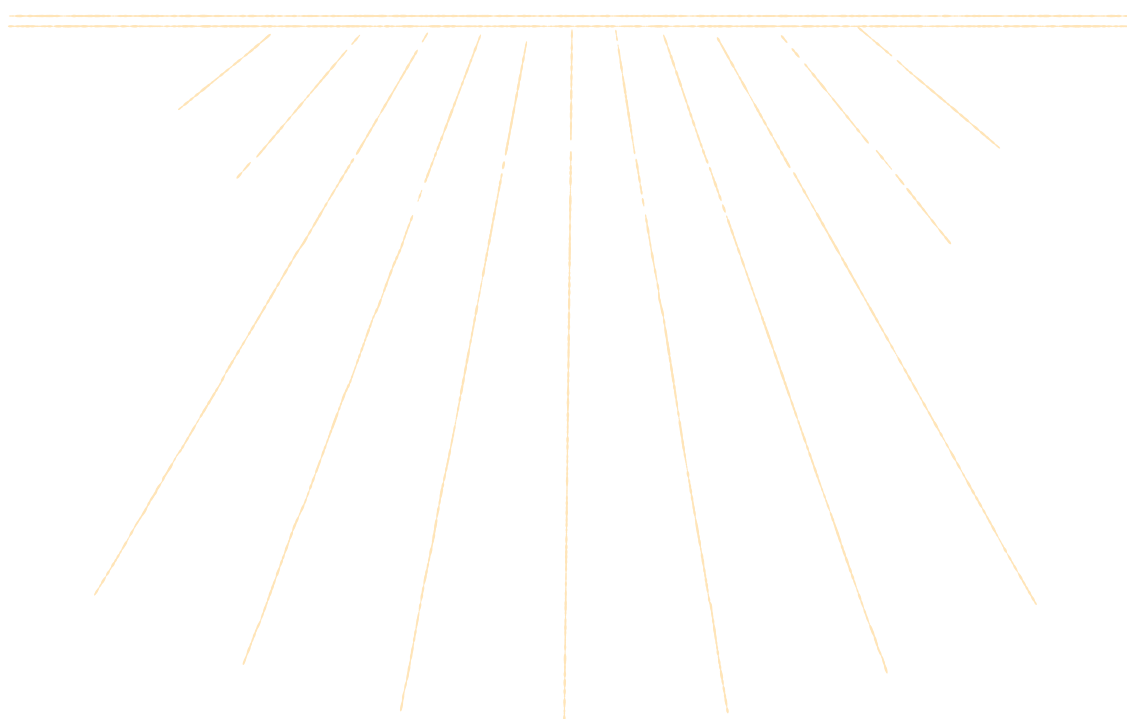




ADVENT



REDEEMER CHURCH GUIDE

contents

How It All Began.....	1	Into the Lions' Den.....	13
God Starts Over.....	2	From a Fishing Boat to a Fish's Belly.....	15
God's Pretty Crazy Promise	3	God's People Head Home.....	16
Tears in the Desert	4	God is Coming to Earth to Stay.....	17
The People God Picks.....	5	The World's Longest Quiet Game.....	18
The Dreamer Who Saved the World.....	6	Preparing the Way for the King.....	19
Free at Last.....	7	What Two Friends Saw.....	20
A New Home for God's People	8	God Does Something New.....	21
A Very Strong, Very Tall, Very Brave King	9	Midnight Message From God.....	22
A Heart Like God's.....	10	A Bright Star, a Tiny Town, & 3 Special Gifts.....	23
God's Golden House.....	11	Immanuel, God With Us.....	24
Fire on the Mountain.....	12	The Best Part of Christmas.....	25
God's Forever Plan.....	13		

Advent



Beginning four Sundays prior to Christmas, the church has historically celebrated the season of advent since as early as the fourth century AD. The term “advent” comes directly from the Latin word meaning “coming”. The practice of observing advent is a set aside time to reflect on the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, coming into the life of sinners to redeem them, and looking forward to his return to the Earth when all things are made right.

The idea of advent is inseparable from the idea of waiting. We live in a culture that is desperately trying to escape waiting..

“Which grocery checkout line is moving fastest?”

“Why can’t I skip this thirty second ad on the Youtube video I’m trying to watch?”

“If it isn’t available for two-day shipping on Prime, I’d rather just order something else instead.”

These small “inconveniences” shed light on a deeper problem we have with waiting. More times than not, we wish to be in the next season of life at the quickest possible rate..

“I’m ready to graduate so I can start my career.”

“I can’t wait to have kids.”

“Once all the kids are in school it will get easier”

... And so on. The trick is, there are probably nuggets of truth in every reason we wish away the waiting. It might be easier, better, happier, etc. But the next season is rarely what we were hoping for, full of new obstacles of its own, and the cycle of trying to escape the waiting continues.

The Old Testament is more than two-thirds of our Bible and the status of God’s people for the majority of those pages is “waiting.” The waiting begins in Genesis 3:15 after the Fall when God promises someone is coming who will defeat the power of Satan. And thus, beginning with Adam and Eve, God’s people waited. They waited for deliverance from Egypt, which they received, but then they immediately entered another period of waiting, wandering the wilderness as they waited to enter the promised land. They waited for God to give them a king who could bring them the security they desired and then they waited in exile again and again. In each of these seasons, God’s people wished away the waiting. They couldn’t see that all of these things were a shadow of what was to come. Yet, all the while God continued to repeat His promise from Genesis 3: something greater is coming, but until then you wait.

Finally the promised One comes. The wait is over. He is here. But for Israel, the response was mixed. After all of this waiting, it isn’t what they thought it would be. Not a mighty King coming to save them with military and political power, but a baby born in Bethlehem. Some would reject him, preferring a messiah of their own making who would get them out of one season and into the next. But for those who understood that this baby meant the promise of Satan’s defeat would be fulfilled, they were “glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard” (Luke 2:20), knowing that Jesus is the unexpected, but glorious and gracious way of salvation.

Through Jesus coming to the earth, living a life of perfect obedience, and paying the price for the sin of God’s people, the promise made in the first few pages of the Bible is accomplished. And that promise is not accomplished in a theoretical, abstract sense. Jesus isn’t an idea or a thought that we can vaguely believe in. He came to the earth in a physical body, in space and time, to accomplish the promises of God. The first coming of Christ means that because of grace, those of us who are in Christ have a relationship with the same great God who has worked his will throughout all of history. As we enter this advent season, you are invited to set your heart and your hope on the God who has always kept His promises.



This guide follows the story pattern of “The King is Coming” Advent Blocks so that this resource can be used by adults individually or in conjunction with family discipleship during this season. The blocks are designed to walk through the narrative of scripture so each day has a selection of scriptures that highlight the promise of God’s presence from Genesis to Revelation. If you would like to listen to daily scripture readings, you can join Redeemer’s Dwell App subscription to find the Advent reading plan.

**As we enter this
advent season,
you are invited
to set your heart
and your hope on
the God who has
always kept His
promises.**

Day 3 – God’s Pretty Crazy Promise

IIII GENESIS 15:1-6; 17:1-14; 21:1-7

How many times have you had someone promise they were going to do something and then it never happens? I bet most of us can think of quite a few of those times. The Bible is full of promises because the author of the Bible is The Promise Keeper, the one who always perfectly fulfills His promises.

Read Genesis 15:1-6, 17:1-14, and 21:1-7.

These passages use another word for promise. Take a minute to look up the word “covenant” and consider how a covenant is different from a promise.

In this covenant to Abraham, God proclaims that He will make Abraham the “the father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:4). Notice the two promises within this statement. First, and seemingly of most concern to Abraham, is that he will be a father. At this point Abraham is very old, nearing 100, and his wife Sarah is nearing 90. Biologically, it is impossible for Abraham to become a father. Yet, God promises Abraham that he will be. Secondly, God promises that He will make Abraham the father of a multitude of nations. Notice the last letter—the “s” makes it plural meaning not just one nation, but many.

From the beginning, God’s plan of redemption was always to use this one nation to bless all nations. In the immediate, God fulfilled His first promise to Abraham and Sarah through the impossible birth of their son Isaac. This was the start of what would become the nation of Israel. Abraham would die without seeing the second promise fulfilled, but he had seen and believed that God always keeps His promises, even the impossible ones.

Many years later, God would fulfill His second promise to Abraham through the impossible birth of another baby to Mary and Joseph. He would be called “Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1) and His kingdom will consist of people from every tribe and nation and tongue (Revelation 7).

Thank you that You are the Promise Keeper. From the beginning of time, you have covenanted with Your people, and You always fulfill Your covenants. Lord, I repent of the ways that I don’t believe Your promises, and instead try to control things on my own. Help me to remember all of the ways You have already shown Yourself faithful, and help me to believe and have faith that You will do what You have said You will do.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Re-read Genesis 15:1-6 and Genesis 17:1-14. Write down all of the promises God makes to Abraham.
2. Now, read Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38. Write down all of the promises God makes to Joseph and Mary.
3. Next, read Luke 24. Write down all of the promises Jesus makes to His disciples.
4. Where in your life do you think God is moving too slowly or not moving at all? What would it look like to trust that God’s slowness is not a sign of His absence?

Day 4 – Tears in the Desert

■■■■■■■■■■ GENESIS 16:1-13; 21:8-20

Yesterday, we read about how God covenanted with Abraham to make him the “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:4) and the Bible says that Abraham believed God and that it was counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). But ten years later, Abraham and Sarah were still waiting for this promised child. From their human perspective, it would seem there was no way this heir was going to be born from Sarah’s womb. So, they took matters into their own hands, and, as always happens, it didn’t go well.

Read Genesis 16:1-13.

Oftentimes, we can act as though our disbelief and doubt of God’s promises is only a personal matter between us and God, but here we see here that Abraham and Sarah’s disbelief caused them to act in ways that dishonored God and hurt others. It didn’t take long for them to figure out that while yes, Abraham had a son, this was not what God had promised. Sarah grew jealous and together with Abraham, drove a pregnant Hagar to flee into the desert. As a slave, Hagar had no power and technically, she was not a partaker of the covenant promises that God made to Abraham.

But in Genesis 16:7, we see that “the angel of the Lord” appears to Hagar. Many scholars believe that the angel of the Lord is what we call a “christophany”, an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. Other scholars believe that this is a special angel—a unique messenger of the Lord. Either way, when the angel of the Lord shows up, important things happen. In this exchange, God goes and finds Hagar in the wilderness and not only saves her life, but makes a promise to Hagar—that her son would grow up to be a great nation as well. In response, Hagar gives God a name – “El Roi”, which means the God who sees. She says that she has seen the God who sees her. The God of Abraham is the God who sees her.

Read Genesis 21:8-20.

After the birth of Isaac, it seems that God’s promise to make a great nation out of Hagar’s son, Ishmael, looks impossible. She is back in the desert with her son, exiled and near death. Like Abraham and Sarah, Hagar likely looked at her circumstances and doubted the promise God made to her. But again, the angel of the Lord appears to Hagar in the wilderness, reminds her of God’s promises and provides a well of water that saves them. Ishmael did indeed become a great nation, just as God promised to Hagar.

This story is repeated throughout the Bible – God makes a promise that seems impossible. In response, God’s people don’t keep their promises and sin because of their disbelief. And even when they don’t see God, He sees them and He remembers His promises.

God, thank You that Your promises never fail. Even when it is impossible with man, nothing is impossible with You. Lord, I confess that often I find ways to make things work on my own, trying to manipulate and control Your promises to make them happen in my time and in my way. Lord, help me to trust in You. Let me see You God, the one who truly sees me in my suffering and sin, and sent Christ to save me.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Has there been a time in your life when you doubted God’s promises, but then saw His faithfulness? What did you learn about Him?
2. What are some promises that God has made that seem impossible to you right now?
3. When you doubt God’s promises or question His timing, how do you respond?
4. Think about a specific area where you are struggling to trust God right now. What is one specific action you can take to remember what God has done and trust in His promises?

Day 7 – Free at Last

XXXXXXXXXXXX EXODUS 1-4, 11-12

Read Exodus 1-4 and 11-12.

Between Genesis 50 and Exodus 1, approximately 430 years have elapsed and a few things have changed. While Joseph lived, Israel lived well in Egypt. But after Joseph's death, there was a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph and did not treat Israel with the same kindness as the kings before him. The Israelites are slaves in Egypt, but Exodus 1:7 tells us that the Israelites "were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them." Under this new Pharaoh, Israel began to experience oppression and suffering. Exodus 2:24-25 tells us God's people cried out to Him, and that God saw them.

In response to their cries, God gives them Moses, a leader who would bring them out of Egypt into the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The story of Moses is almost cinematic. It's easy to be distracted by the amazing scenes recorded—plagues, staffs that turn into snakes, miracles—and miss the big idea: God is in complete control of hearts, frogs, water, everything and there is no God like Him.

This story is significant and told again and again throughout the Old Testament. In Psalm 77, the psalmist Asaph recounts the events of Exodus and God's incredible work in leading Israel through the Red Sea. In his time of trouble, Asaph turns to the same God who triumphed over the sea, saying, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples." (Psalm 77:11-14).

This story would be told again and again throughout the Old Testament because Moses was meant to point to a greater Redeemer, drawing God's people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land just as Jesus would come to draw His people out of the slavery of our sin and into His eternal presence.

So God would command His people to remember His works and His power to free them from slavery (Exodus 12:24-27). But like us, their hearts were often plagued by fear and doubt. Like us, they had to fight to remember who God is and what He has done for them.

Heavenly Father, we praise You as Yahweh, the great I Am. Truly, there is no more perfect way to encompass all that You are. Thank You for the ways You have so kindly revealed Yourself to us. Help us to remember who You are and what You have done for us. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 1-2. What similarities do you see between Moses and Jesus? How does the story of Moses foreshadow Christ's coming?
2. God is revealing Himself to Moses and the Israelites, but also to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. What did they learn about God? How do you think that impacted their relationship with Him?
3. For God's people to be safe from the death of their firstborn sons, they had to obey exactly what God said. What does God say we have to do in order to be safe inside Jesus?
4. How can you fight to remember who God is and what He has done in your life today?

Day 9 – A Very Strong, Very Tall, Very Brave King

1 SAMUEL 15

Can you remember a time as a child when you asked a parent or teacher for something, such as dessert, money for a cheap toy, or to do an assignment your way? While they might have known it wouldn't go well, their "yes" allowed you to experience the folly of your choice. Maybe the dessert ended up causing a stomach ache, the toy broke the first time you played with it, or the assignment didn't go as planned.

In the book of 1 Samuel, God's people are living in the land God had promised them. He has been faithful to His covenant, bringing them out of Egypt, keeping them through 40 years in the wilderness, and helping them overcome enemy nations. And yet, despite His faithfulness and provision, they want to be like the nations around them. They demand a king to rule over them.

Can you imagine this request? A king? These are the chosen people of the King. No human king could care for them as fully and perfectly as their heavenly one. But instead of delighting in and trusting Him, they desire a lesser option. God tells Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). Because He is sovereign and omniscient, the Lord knows this request is not for Israel's good and He even tells them all the bad things their human king will do in leading them. But rather than punishing Israel for their sinful desires, the Lord gives the people what they want. He gives them Saul. In His kindness, He also gives Saul His Spirit (1 Samuel 10:9-10).

Saul was the epitome of what Israel had in mind when they thought of a king. He was handsome, strong, and tall...heads and shoulders above all other men. Yet even with these God-given gifts of size and strength and the presence of the Spirit of God, we see Saul doubting his call from the Lord and hiding when Samuel announces him to the people (1 Samuel 10:22). He can't be found because he's crouching behind baggage.

It's not exactly the start Israel had in mind when they demanded a king, and it foreshadows Saul's reign. While the Lord provides him with victories early on, his kingship is characterized by an

insistence on doing things his own way rather than walking in obedience to God. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in 1 Samuel 15.

Read 1 Samuel 15.

Samuel tells Saul to fight the Amalekites and to devote everything to destruction. While Saul experiences a mighty victory, he spares Amalek's King Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, calves, and lambs. We see Saul take the things that were supposed to be devoted to destruction for his own gain and greed. Because he rejected the word of the Lord, God rejected him from being king (1 Samuel 15:23).

The Israelites would continue looking for a king to rule over them. Someday, they would see their king coming and cry out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). And although He wasn't the king they expected, through Him, God would bring them into a kingdom that could not be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).

Father, you are the true, most perfect King. Forgive us for letting other things sit on the thrones of our hearts. We acknowledge that none of those things fill us the way You do. Thank you for sending Jesus to lay down His life to pay the price for our sin. Grant us your grace to walk in love, trust, and obedience to You. It's in your good, holy name that we pray. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Was Jesus the kind of king that Israel wanted and was waiting for? Why didn't God make Jesus look like a king so that everyone would know who He was?
2. What are the areas of your life where you consider yourself most confident or talented?
3. How have you misused the gifts God has granted you, either by doubting them or by using them for personal gain instead of His glory?
4. Read 1 Samuel 15:20-22. Where is God calling you to obey His voice today? What excuses are you tempted to make?

Day 10 – A Heart Like God’s



1 SAMUEL 16:1-13; 2 SAMUEL 11; PSALM 51

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Saul’s reign as king was characterized primarily by disobedience, which ultimately cost him the presence of God’s spirit and the loss of his kingship. Rather than leaving the people of Israel without a leader, God provided a king. This time, however, the leader the Lord provided was nothing like Israel expected. David was the youngest of his father’s family. He was small and inexperienced, and the last person you would expect to lead a nation. But the Lord told Samuel not to be deceived by outward appearance. God had chosen David because he was a man after God’s own heart.

What does it mean to be someone after God’s heart? The word “after” can involve positioning, desire, or imitation. For example, you could say, “I was born after my brother” or, “He went hard after the ball” or, “She takes after her mother”. So whether we are looking at the position of David’s heart in relation to the Lord, the desire of his heart, or what his heart imitates, the focus is the Lord.

While David’s reign as king is in direct contrast to Saul’s, he was not without his own sins. We could argue that what truly demonstrates David is a man after God’s own heart isn’t that he walked perfectly, but how he responded when he failed.

Read 2 Samuel 11 and Psalm 51.

We see David commit the unthinkable in his treatment of Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. And in the next chapter, the Lord sends Nathan the prophet to convict and rebuke David for his sinful actions. This

encounter with Nathan is the context in which David writes Psalm 51. His words here teach us so much about repentance. We see a clear and honest acknowledgment that he has sinned and that while his sin has tragically impacted multiple people, his sin is first and foremost against the holy God. He cries out for his only hope: for the Lord to create in him a clean heart. Once he has experienced the cleansing that can only come from the Lord, David will not be quiet, but instead tell others what the Lord has done.

Father, we want to be people who know Your heart so intimately that we see You rightly in all ways: we acknowledge You in our actions, words, and thoughts. We desire You above all else. And we seek to walk in obedience and be more like You. Let us encourage one another to be quick to confess and repent. Thank you for the gift of Jesus, our perfect King, who laid down His life to pay the price for our sin and shame.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Though David was seen as one of Israel’s best and most beloved kings, how is Jesus our more perfect King?
2. How is God convicting you of sin and inviting you to repent and receive His cleansing today?
3. Psalm 51 begins with the words, “To the Choirmaster.” This phrase indicates this psalm was meant to be used in public worship. David’s song of repentance isn’t for him alone. He makes his confession, repentance, and praise a corporate act. How can we as a church spur one another toward confession, repentance, and obedience?

Day 11 – God’s Golden House



1 CHRONICLES 22; 2 CHRONICLES 5-7

Read 1 Chronicles 22, 2 Chronicles 5-7 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-20

Try to picture the most beautiful, amazing home you have ever seen. When you see this home, who do you imagine lives in it? Now can you imagine trying to build a home for God? The temple was supposed to be a beautiful, amazing home for God, where His presence would dwell. So no wonder the people used so many fine materials and spent a great deal of time worshiping and consecrating the temple for God.

This isn’t the first time in the Bible that Israel has made a home for God. In Exodus, we read about the building of the tabernacle, a mobile tent with the centerpiece of the ark of the covenant, where God would meet with man. Read 2 Chronicles 6:18. Solomon is right—how can we even imagine the God of the universe coming and living on earth? Yet, here in this temple, just like the tabernacle, at the ark of the covenant, God did indeed dwell among the people for a time.

But eventually, the people of Israel would sin, and the ark of the covenant would be stolen so the presence of God departed from among them. What an incredibly sad, tragic ending for this beautiful home...if that was the ending. But it’s not, is it? We know that once again, God would come to dwell among His people. This time though, it wouldn’t be in a fancy temple. Instead, God sent His Son, Jesus, to dwell among us and make a way for us to dwell with Him forever.

God, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to tabernacle among us. Thank You that through His blood we have direct access to You. Thank You that You are always drawing near to Your people. Lord, I confess that I often push you away. I confess that I forget the great sacrifice Jesus made in coming to earth. Lord, help me to live in light of this truth. Help me to have a heart of gratitude and may my life reflect this. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Re-read the descriptions of the temple. As you read, note the different materials, directions, rules, etc. What is significant about these? What might this mean for us today?
2. Read John 1:14. What does it mean that Jesus came and dwelt (literally translated: tabernacled) among us?
3. Read Hebrews 9. Write down the similarities and differences between the physical tabernacle, the temple, and Jesus.
4. How is Jesus better than the tabernacle and temple? How can you enjoy your access to God’s presence through the blood of Jesus today?

Day 12 – Fire on the Mountain

1 KINGS 18–19

Today, we're fast-forwarding a bit in time. The nation of Israel has split into two kingdoms: Israel and Judah. Sadly, most of the kings are evil, and the people repeatedly turn away from God. In His kindness, the Lord sends prophets to call the people back to Himself, urging them to repent and turn from their sin. But, much like us at times, the Israelites aren't always receptive to this correction. It's easy to judge them, but if we're honest, we're not all that different.

Read 1 Kings 18-19.

In Chapter 18, we see one of the most powerful moments in Scripture. God sends fire to consume Elijah's soaking wet altar, displaying His incredible power and authority. The people are stunned, and they believe. Elijah rightly bows down and praises the Lord for His mighty work. But what happens next? Elijah, just moments after seeing God's fire, is running for his life. The very next chapter shows him in fear, hiding in a cave. In the cave, Elijah is desperate for guidance, and the Lord passes by in a way Elijah doesn't expect. He's not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in a gentle whisper. It's a quiet, unexpected moment where God meets Elijah in his fear and loneliness, comforting him and revealing the next step in His plan. It's a powerful reminder that God's presence isn't always in the dramatic or loud; sometimes, it's in the stillness, the whisper, the unexpected.

When Jesus was born, the Jews were expecting a triumphant, earthly King who would overthrow Rome and establish an earthly kingdom. But when Jesus came, He wasn't born in a palace or with fanfare. He came as a humble baby, born in a manger, and the world didn't even make room for Him. But

His coming was so much greater than anything the Jews had imagined. Jesus didn't come to set up a temporary kingdom. He came to establish an eternal kingdom that will never end.

Jesus is King—not just for today, but forever. Our hope isn't in an earthly king who will one day pass away, but in the eternal King who reigns over all and will never be moved. Even in times when things seem uncertain or the world feels overwhelming, we can find comfort in the whisper of God's presence. He is always at work, unfolding His greater plan of redemption, just as He did for Elijah and just as He did through Jesus.

God, thank You that You are the one true God and You have revealed Yourself to us throughout history. Lord, I confess that I don't always live as though You are the one true God. I take Your good creation and misuse it for my worship. Lord, help me to worship You and You alone. Help me to desire You above all else. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think God chose to reveal His power so dramatically in 1 Kings 18? What does this reveal about God's desire to make Himself known and draw His people to Himself? How does this moment of revelation reflect His character and His commitment to His people?
2. Why do you think God required the prophets of Baal to be killed? How does this challenge you to consider the seriousness of the idols in your own life? Are there any areas where you've allowed things—whether possessions, people, or desires—to take the place of God?
3. How might you have wrong expectations for how God should reveal Himself to you?
4. When you feel overwhelmed or afraid, do you recognize the quiet ways God might be speaking to you?

Day 15 – From a Fishing Boat to a Fish’s Belly

■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■■ JONAH 1–3

Read Jonah 1-3.

Nineveh was a bad place filled with bad people doing bad things. So when God sent His prophet Jonah to warn them of the destruction coming to their city if they did not repent and turn to God. Jonah was angry. He wanted God to judge them and destroy them, so rather than delivering God’s message and inviting them to turn away from their sin, Jonah tried to run away. Because if the people didn’t receive the message, then maybe God would have to crush them.

But try as he might, Jonah couldn’t run away from God. God wouldn’t let him. After three days in the belly of the fish, Jonah finally listened to God and went to Nineveh to share God’s message of repentance. And the people of Nineveh, including the king, turned to God and cried out for forgiveness. They asked for God’s mercy and God didn’t destroy them.

Has God’s mercy towards sinners ever made you angry? Even after his experience in the belly of the fish, Jonah was angry that God would be compassionate and merciful to those who ask for forgiveness. He believed that he had the right to judge and determine who was worthy of God’s message of compassion and coming judgement, missing the fact that he himself was a sinner in need of God’s mercy.

God came to save sinners. Not just you and the people you love, but people from every tribe and tongue and nation. That is the message of Christmas. God sent His messenger to a bad place filled with bad

people doing bad things, and He wasn’t angry or indifferent. And He didn’t just deliver a message, He died for His enemies.

Are there people who you think are beyond the grace of Jesus, people who you think don’t deserve the gospel? Ask the Spirit of God to reveal who those people are for you. If you can’t think of specific people, contemplate the characteristics or types of people that are hard for you to love or who you avoid. Ask God for the opportunity to tell them about the grace of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Bible say that we are God’s enemies? What did Jesus do for His enemies?
2. When have you felt a calling from God that felt uncomfortable? How did you respond?
3. Can you think of a time when you were quick to accept God’s compassion toward you, but slow to extend it to another? Do you trust God’s timing on when he shows compassion and when he extends judgment?
4. How has God arranged your times and places to intersect with people you would rather avoid? What would it look like to take the glorious, gracious message of Christmas to them?

Day 16 – God’s People Head Home

■■■■■■■■■ EZRA 1, 3; HAGGAI 2

Have you ever felt like you were far from where you’re supposed to be? Maybe life has taken unexpected turns, or you’re facing a season of feeling displaced, uncertain, or even lost. We’ve all been there at one point or another—wondering if we’ll ever get back to the place we were meant to be. For the Israelites, this wasn’t just a feeling. They had been exiled from their homeland, carried away from Jerusalem, and for decades, they lived in captivity, far from the land God had promised them. But even in their exile, God had not forgotten them. And just like the Israelites, God never forgets us.

Read Ezra 1, 3, and Haggai 2.

After 70 years of exile, God stirs the heart of King Cyrus of Persia to not only allow the Israelites to return to their land, but to provide them with the resources they need to rebuild the temple. Imagine that—a foreign king, who didn’t even worship the God of Israel, becomes the instrument God uses to fulfill His promises. This wasn’t coincidence; it was the sovereign hand of God at work to bring His people back to where they belong.

As the Israelites set out on their journey back, the excitement must have been overwhelming. But when they arrived, the reality of rebuilding was much harder than they expected. There was great joy and celebration, but there was also deep mourning. The older generation wept because they remembered the glory of the first temple and realized how far the new one would fall short. Despite their faith, the work seemed insignificant compared to what had been lost.

Yet, in Haggai 2, God speaks directly to this discouragement. He tells the people, “Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you... My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not” (Haggai 2:4-5). God reminds them that although the current temple

might seem small in comparison to the former, He is still with them, and the future glory of this house would be greater than the former (Haggai 2:9). The people were looking at the task ahead and seeing how far they had to go, but God saw beyond their limited vision. He saw the end from the beginning and reassured them that His plans were still in motion, even if they couldn’t see it all yet. God’s presence and His faithfulness are not tied to the size of the project or the condition of the place; they are tied to His covenant and His promises.

The journey of God’s people back home wasn’t just about a physical return to a land; it was about God’s promise to restore and renew His people. That promise was ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who came to bring us home—not just to a land, but to God Himself.

Thank You for bringing us home, not just to a place, but to Yourself. We know that through Jesus, we are made whole. He is the fulfillment of every promise, and in Him, we have the ultimate assurance that You will finish the work You’ve started in us. May we walk forward in faith, knowing that our home is not just a place, but in Your presence forever.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the things you long for in life—peace, security, belonging, or joy?
2. How might these longings be connected to a deeper desire for God’s presence and the ultimate home He promises us in heaven?
3. If you could go back in time and encourage the Israelites, knowing that Jesus was coming, who is the better temple and the very presence of God to dwell among us, what would you say?
4. How does looking back at these Old Testament stories increase your love and appreciation for Jesus and the access that you have to God’s presence right now?

Day 17 – God is Coming to Earth to Stay

LUKE 1:5–25

For hundreds of years, the prophets had spoken of a coming Messiah who would bring light to the darkness, who would redeem Israel, and who would usher in the kingdom of God. But for four hundred years, God had been silent. No new words had come from the prophets. In their hearts, the people must have wondered: Has God forgotten us? But what they didn't know was that God was quietly at work, preparing the way for the fulfillment of His promises. And the first step in His plan came through an old, barren couple.

Read Luke 1:5-25.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were an older couple, beyond childbearing years, and for all their lives, they had longed for a child—only to face disappointment again and again. Then, one day, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah with a message that would change everything: they were going to have a son, and that son would prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus. God was about to come to earth, just as He promised, and this was the first step.

Zechariah's doubt makes sense—how could this happen when they were so old? But the angel reminded him that nothing is impossible with God. God's ways are higher than our ways, and His plans are not limited by our circumstances. God had already chosen this couple, already made the promise, and was already at work—even when it seemed impossible. See this wasn't just the fulfillment of a promise for Zechariah and Elizabeth; it was the beginning of God fulfilling His greater promise to send a Savior to the world.

The God who had once dwelt in the midst of His people—guiding them with pillars of cloud and fire, speaking through prophets—was now coming near in a way that would change everything. God was coming to earth. And not just to visit—He was coming to stay.

The birth of Jesus, the Messiah, was the moment when God's promises to His people were being realized. He would live among us, dwell with us, and remain with us forever.

Before you do another thing today, enjoy that glorious and magnificent reality. Just spend some time sitting and being in the presence of the God who is with you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are you waiting for in your life right now? How does the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth help you reframe your own waiting?
2. Zechariah doubted the message of the angel, wondering how a promise could come true when circumstances seemed impossible. What promises of God might you be doubting because of your circumstances? How can you choose to trust that God's ways are higher than your own?
3. The birth of Jesus signified God's ultimate promise: He came to dwell with His people. How can you experience the presence of Jesus in your daily life? What are some practical ways you can cultivate a deeper awareness of God with you, especially during times of waiting or uncertainty?

Day 18 – The World’s Longest Quiet Game

LUKE 1:57-79

God is a God who keeps His promises. He had spoken throughout history through His prophets, declaring His intentions to rescue His people, restore His creation, and bring about a future of hope.

Read Luke 1:57-79.

Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, bursts into praise, recognizing that the child he now holds is part of God’s long-awaited plan. His son, John, would be the prophet who prepares the way for the coming of the Lord, but the true fulfillment of God’s promises lies in the child who would be born to Mary—a child who would bring peace, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins.

In Zechariah’s song, we hear of the God who brings light to those living in darkness (v. 79), who delivers His people from the power of sin (v. 74), and who offers mercy and forgiveness (v. 72). Zechariah declares that God is visiting His people and redeeming them, remembering His holy covenant—the oath He swore to Abraham to rescue them from their enemies and give them freedom. This is the moment when those ancient promises, spoken through the prophets, are coming to life. God is not just visiting Israel; He is bringing salvation to the world.

Zechariah himself had struggled with doubt when the angel first appeared to him. But now, in the light of his son’s birth, he sees clearly that God’s word can always be trusted. The promises were not idle words—they were God’s sure plan, unfolding in the birth of John and, in a few months, the birth of Jesus. Zechariah’s song is a beautiful reminder that even when God

seems silent, He is always at work, fulfilling His promises in His perfect timing. So as we wait for Christ’s return, we can join Zechariah in declaring, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come to His people and redeemed them.”

Father, we thank You that You are a God who speaks, who promises, and who fulfills those promises. Thank You for the way You faithfully worked through the prophets and through the birth of John and Jesus to fulfill Your plan of salvation. Help us to remember that even when it feels like You are silent, You are always at work, and Your promises are sure. As we wait in this Advent season, may our hearts be filled with hope, knowing that the Savior has come, and He will come again. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The prophets had foretold the coming of a Savior. How does understanding the Old Testament promises deepen your appreciation for the birth of Jesus? What does it mean for you that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s word?
2. Zechariah acknowledges that God is bringing salvation not only to Israel but to the nations. How does the global scope of God’s promise affect your perspective on sharing the gospel with others?
3. In the midst of waiting, Zechariah struggled with doubt and uncertainty. How can his eventual song of praise inspire you to trust God even when things seem uncertain or delayed?

Day 20 – What Two Friends Saw

LUKE 2:21–38

It's no secret that waiting is something most of us dread. In our fast-paced culture, who enjoys standing in line at the grocery store or sitting in the doctor's office? We often do everything we can to avoid it, filling those moments with impatience or frustration.

But there are times when waiting can be different. If you've ever been to a sold-out concert or a big event, you know what I mean. People will wait in line, sometimes for hours, and actually enjoy the process. As they wait, they'll sing along to their favorite songs, talk about what they're most excited to see, share stories of past concerts, and even make new friends. By the time the event starts, what began as a simple line has become a shared experience, a community of people united by anticipation.

We are in that kind of line, aren't we? We are living in a season of waiting—waiting for the fulfillment of God's plan and the coming of His Kingdom. What if we could experience this waiting with the same joy and expectation as a fan waiting to see their favorite artist?

Read Luke 2:21-38.

In these verses, we encounter two figures—Simeon and Anna—who spent their entire lives waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise. They were known for their unwavering hope, and even now, they are remembered for what they were waiting for: the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. By showing us Simeon and Anna, God gives us a glimpse of every believer's deep longing for Christ, whether we are waiting for His first coming, like they were, or His return, as we are. Simeon's joy at seeing Jesus, and

Anna's praise, reflect the joy we feel when we truly grasp the gospel of Jesus Christ. What Simeon and Anna had waited their whole lives to see, we can read about every time we open our Bibles. They longed for the fulfillment of God's promises, and we long for Christ's return in the fullness of His glory.

But in the meantime, let's not wait as if we're standing in line for something we're unsure of or dread. There will be seasons of waiting that feel long, difficult, or even painful. But faithfulness is about enduring the ups and downs of life, knowing that the waiting we're in will end just like Simeon's and Anna's lives ended—with the peace and joy of encountering Christ. Our hope is secure, and one day, we will see Him face to face. Until then, let's wait with joy, knowing that the fulfillment of God's promises is sure.

Thank You for the gift of waiting—not as a burden, but as an opportunity to draw near to You. Just as Simeon and Anna waited with longing and hope, help us to wait with joy and anticipation, knowing that Your promises are always true. We give You our hearts, our hopes, and our waiting. Come, Lord Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are Simeon and Anna's reactions to seeing Jesus? How are they similar? How are they different?
2. If you were honest, what words would describe your waiting for the return of Christ? Does your life look like you are anticipating the joyful and mighty return of the King? Or does your life look like you are waiting in line for a less attractive and unfulfilling event?
3. The way we wait is important because of the value of what we are waiting for. Why is Jesus worth waiting for?
4. How would your life look different if you joyfully anticipated waiting for Jesus' return?

Day 21 – God Does Something New

LUKE 1:26–38, 46–55

Israel has waited. Longed. Despaired. For centuries, the people of Israel had faced one failure after another. The promises of God, given to Abraham, Moses, and David, seemed distant. The law, with all its commands and sacrifices, shone a harsh light on their disobedience. They knew a Messiah was coming—a Savior who would rescue them. But they expected something grand, something mighty: a decorated warrior, a king with power, one who would overthrow their oppressors and set up a glorious reign. Instead, the Savior came in a way no one could have predicted. Jesus, the promised Messiah, did not enter the world as a warrior king, but as a baby. And not just any baby—He was born to a humble, young virgin named Mary, betrothed to a carpenter named Joseph, a man in the royal line of David.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

The angel Gabriel appears to Mary, a young woman in Nazareth, and tells her that she will conceive a child by the Holy Spirit. This is not just any child—this will be the Son of God. Mary’s initial reaction is one of confusion, as she asks how this could happen, given that she is a virgin. But the angel’s response is clear: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” (Luke 1:35).

This miraculous conception declares that God is the ultimate ruler of life. He is not constrained by human limitations. The power that spoke creation into existence now works in Mary’s womb, bringing forth the Savior of the world. When God speaks, His word creates life where there was none.

Read Luke 1:46-55.

Mary’s song reveals much about the Savior she is about to bring into the world. Mary praises God for His mighty deeds, for lifting up the humble, and for filling the hungry with good things. She sings of a God who scatters the proud, brings down

the mighty, and exalts the lowly. In these words, Mary proclaims a God whose kingdom is upside down, a kingdom that does not work according to the world’s standards. This Savior, born in humble circumstances, will turn the world’s values on their head.

The Israelites anticipated a king of strength and grandeur. Instead, God sent a Savior in weakness, born of a virgin, in a small town, to a humble couple. This child, born in poverty, would grow to fulfill the law perfectly, heal the brokenhearted, and offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. And yet, in His humility, we see the deepest expression of God’s power. Jesus didn’t need an army to win the victory. He didn’t need a palace to rule. He entered the world in the quiet of a manger, and His power was made perfect in weakness. This is the paradox of the gospel: the greatest power in the universe, displayed in the humblest of ways.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for coming into the world not with the power of an earthly king, but with the humility of a baby. You are the Savior we so desperately needed, the one who entered our world of brokenness to make all things new. Help us to see the beauty in Your unexpected arrival and to live in the hope that You bring. May our hearts overflow with the joy of Your coming, and may we, like Mary, magnify Your name in all we do. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Like the Israelites, we often expect God’s answers to come in ways we can predict or control. In what ways has God surprised you with His answers or His presence in your life? How can you embrace God’s unexpected ways in this Advent season?
2. What does Jesus’ miraculous conception tell us about God’s power over life and death?
3. Mary’s song reminds us that God’s kingdom is marked by humility, justice, and mercy. How does the humble birth of Jesus challenge your own understanding of power, success, and greatness?
4. The coming of Jesus was a moment of great joy and praise for Mary. Write out your own song of praise to God because of the coming of Christ.

Day 22 – Midnight Message From God

■■■■■■■■■■ MATTHEW 1:18–25

The story of Christmas is one of great mystery and wonder, but it's also one of ordinary people wrestling with extraordinary circumstances. For Joseph, the betrothed of Mary, it started as a confusing and frightening dilemma. His world was suddenly upended when he learned that Mary, the woman he was soon to marry, was pregnant. For Joseph, this was not just an inconvenience—it was a deep personal crisis. In the eyes of his community, Mary's pregnancy would be scandalous, and the law would demand that he distance himself from her. But instead of seeking public retribution or harsh judgment, Joseph, with deep compassion, decides to divorce her quietly, sparing her public embarrassment.

Read Matthew 1:18-25.

But God intervenes through an angel in a dream. The angel explains that Mary is carrying the Son of God, and this child will save His people from their sins. The angel speaks with clarity, reminding Joseph of the prophecy from Isaiah: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

At this moment, Joseph's fear and confusion likely reached their peak. Imagine being in his shoes—his soon-to-be-wife was carrying the Savior of the world and his obedience would now play a pivotal role in God's eternal plan of salvation. Joseph's obedience was not easy. It required laying down his own plans, his own sense of what was "right" in the eyes of society, and stepping into a new story—a story that was bigger than his own. And yet, God did not call Joseph to

understand it all at that moment. He called him to trust and obey.

The coming of Jesus was not the answer Joseph, or anyone else, was expecting. The Savior didn't arrive in the way anyone could have imagined. But God's ways are not our ways, and His promises are always good. God's plan to bring salvation to the world began with the obedience of a humble carpenter, and through that obedience, the world was changed forever.

God, You are a good, kind Father who knows exactly what I need. Even though sometimes it is intimidating or confusing to be obedient to You, and even though sometimes the result of that obedience isn't comfortable, I know that I am safest when I am walking in step with You. Would You use my obedience to honor You and display Your glory to those around me?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has fear and confusion kept you from being obedient to what God asks of you?
2. Joseph obeyed God even when he didn't understand all the details. What areas of your life are you struggling to trust God with?
3. How can Joseph's response encourage us in light of the unclear and unexpected things God will call us into?
4. What is one step of obedience you feel God is calling you to take today?

Day 23 – A Bright Star, a Tiny Town, & 3 Special Gifts

III ISAIAH 9:1-7; MATTHEW 2:1-12

Read Isaiah 9:1-7.

The birth of Jesus didn't just change the lives of Mary and Joseph. It changed everything. In Isaiah 9, we hear the promise of a coming King who will bring peace and justice, a ruler who will reign on David's throne and establish His kingdom forever. This King will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). The Israelites had been waiting for generations, enduring oppression and longing for the Messiah, but the birth of Jesus wasn't just for the Israelites. It was for everyone.

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

The wise men weren't from Israel; they were Gentiles, outsiders to the promises that God had made to His people. And yet, they traveled from distant lands, guided by a star because they understood that this child was no ordinary king—He was the Savior of the world. And once they found Jesus, they bowed down in worship.

They didn't just give Him their presence; they gave Him their best. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh—expensive, meaningful gifts. They didn't bring these gifts because Jesus needed them—He didn't. He was God. And yet, when we understand who God is, the only appropriate response is to offer Him everything we have. We offer our best, not out of obligation, but out of a heart that overflows with worship.

The arrival of the wise men reminds us that God had not forgotten His promises. Jesus was Israel's coming King, the Son of David,

who came to deliver His people, but Jesus came for more than just Israel. His coming is the beginning of the kingdom of God. Like was prophesied in Isaiah 9, Jesus came to be the Prince of Peace, and His reign would be one of justice and righteousness, a reign that would never end. In Him, we are made right with God, and we experience the peace that only He can give.

The question for us today is: How will we respond to this great gift? Like the wise men, we are called to offer our best in worship, not because God needs anything from us, but because He is worthy of everything we have. We offer our worship with joy, knowing that in Jesus, God has fulfilled His promises, and through Him, we are brought into His kingdom of peace.

You are the one true King and the only one who deserves my allegiance and worship. If there is anything I value more highly than You, would You reveal it to me so that I can offer myself up to You more completely? Help me to give You my best – my time, my resources, my very self. May my worship reflect the greatness of who You are and the love You have for us. Amen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The wise men are known for the gifts they brought to Jesus. But how did they receive a better gift?
2. If God doesn't need anything from us, why does He invite us to give everything in our lives to Him?
3. What are some areas of your life that you can offer to God in worship? What is one thing you can give to Jesus today—time, resources, talents, or your heart?
4. Isaiah promised a Prince of Peace. What does peace with God look like in your life right now, and how can you experience more of it this Advent season?

Day 24 – Immanuel, God With Us



LUKE 2:1-7; ACTS 2:22-39; PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

What have you held your breath for? A last second shot to win the game? Watching your baby take their first steps? Opening the email that holds your test results? Seeing the sun peak over the horizon in its many colors? The world had been holding its breath. Since sin entered the world, the anticipation of the coming Savior hovered over all of creation.

Read Luke 2:1-7, Acts 2:22-39 & Philippians 2:5-11.

The story of Jesus' birth is more than the night He was born—it is the culmination of centuries of God's people waiting. They had been anticipating the fulfillment of the prophecy made in Isaiah 7:14 (ESV), "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel."

Immanuel. A name that means "God with us." Our loving Father sent His Son for us. In Jesus, God fulfilled His promise! He has come. The years of waiting and wondering are over. They have given way to the flesh-and-blood proof that our Father is faithful. And as we wait for His return, we don't wait alone, because our God is with us.

Before you do another thing today, enjoy that glorious and magnificent reality. Just spend some time sitting and being in the presence of the God who is with you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important that Jesus, who is God, became a human?
2. Read Philippians 2:5-11. According to the text, why has God exalted Jesus so highly?
3. What does it mean to be with someone? What does it mean that God is with us?
4. The gift of Christmas—God's presence with us—is meant to be ours year-round. What would be different if you truly believed God was with you?

Day 25 – The Best Part of Christmas



LUKE 2:8–20; REVELATION 21:1–4; 22:1–5

Have you ever waited so long for something, when it finally arrives, you find it hard to believe that it is here? In our modern era, we have signs and symbols that help us, like the “you have arrived” alert on your navigation system or the ding of an email in your inbox.

Read Luke 2:8-20.

As the shepherds kept watch over their flocks by night, there were no alarms or alerts to notify them. Think of those shepherds. They were minding their own business, doing their normal daily tasks, absolutely unaware that on the other side of town, cows and sheep were witnessing the world being turned upside down. But God broke through. Angels appeared to them and spoke to them. Luke tells us “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Luke 2:9). The lights and scene definitely got their attention, but it was what the angel said that sealed the deal: the announcement that the Savior had come. So they scrambled over hillsides, set their eyes on their Savior and worshiped and celebrated God’s greatest gift. Then they went back to their sheep, but they went back changed, glorifying and praising God.

This is the truth we have been celebrating during advent: the Savior has come! And here is more good news: He is coming back again!

Read Revelation 21:1-4 and 22:1-5.

Just as surely God fulfilled His promise that Jesus would come, He will come again. It is hard to imagine what that day will truly be

like. But we know this, because the Bible makes it clear: we will be with God and God will be with us. Death will be no more. We will see our King enthroned and live to worship Him forever.

He is with us. The one, true God is with us. Don't merely know that as true information, but meditate on it. Pray that God would let it bring you joy that overflows in such a way that you can't help but tell others about it. Pray that He would comfort your restless heart with His promises that He is with you and He will never leave you. Christ has come, and He will come again, only this time He will complete the story that He began.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is there anyone who comes to your mind that needs to hear the great message of Christmas, that God has given us the greatest gift we could ever hope to receive?
2. Just as God promised that a Savior would come, He has promised that Jesus will return. How can we wait in hopeful expectation for Jesus’ return?
3. Why should it encourage us that Christ is coming again? How would our lives look different if we lived in a way that put the full weight of our trust in the promises of God?