



Study Guide & Devotional 2021

The four tenants of
The Freedom of Advent

- Worship fully.
- Spend less.
- Give more.
- Love all.

Introduction for Advent 2021

For our Advent celebration at Lighthouse this year, we invite you to join us for our sermon series, The Freedom of Advent. Discover how the commemoration of Christ's birth can lead us to a freeing depth of love for God and others.

Over the next four weeks, this booklet will be your resource of encouragement to set your mind and heart on the freedom that Christ's birth came to bring and how we can show this to the world around us. Our prayer this Advent season is that you, along with your family and friends, will experience these weekly encouragements and find true freedom in Christ.

* Scriptures are from the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible.



THE FREEDOM OF ADVENT

Week 1 The Freedom of Advent November 27-December 4

Week 2 The Freedom to Worship Fully December 5-11

Week 3 The Freedom to Spend Less December 12-18

Week 4 The Freedom to Give More December 19-23

Week 5 The Freedom to Love All December 24-26

Week 1: THE FREEDOM OF ADVENT

November 27 - December 4

Christmas always seems like such a joyful time of the year. We look forward to time with family, joyful decorations, and annual traditions that express good tidings to all. But let's be honest, Christmas often creates a burden that by the time new year rolls around we feel worn out, anxious, and ready for the holiday season to be over. This doesn't seem like what God had in mind for one of the most important seasons of celebration on our calendar.

Scripture Focus

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18)

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

Reflection Questions & Practices

LOOK UP

Read Luke 2:8-20, the story of the angels and shepherds. If you were to compare the celebration of the angels and shepherds with the Christmas celebrations we see in our culture, what is different? What seems to be the point of the story of the angels and shepherds?

OWN UP

Do you find yourself more tired and burdened at the end of the holiday season than you were at the beginning? If so, what specific parts of the holiday season can be burdensome for you?

LINK UP

Find a family member, or close friend, to share honestly about the parts of Christmas that feel like a burden. Ask them if they have had a similar experience. Share some conversation around what you believe God wants you to receive from this season of celebration and how you can go about that.

Heavenly Father, I know that this Christmas season is supposed to be all about You. But I also notice that the world's traditions, celebrations, and messages loudly call for my attention. In order for this time of year to be all about You, I need You to realign my heart this Advent season with Your heart. Amen.

Prayer

Week 1: DEVOTIONAL READINGS

Monday, November 29

Read

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

John's take on Jesus coming into the world was that He was light driving out darkness. John has barely begun his gospel narrative before introducing this cosmic conflict as the reason God the Father sent the Son. With a confident foreshadowing of the story's end, John assures us who will ultimately come out on top.

"That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it."

Right here John sums up the season of Advent. Even amidst the great deal of darkness in this world, the light of Jesus Christ shines bright. He who experienced all of the darkness, even death itself, and was not overcome now dwells in us as God's Spirit.

As followers of Jesus, we still live in a world where darkness seems ever-present. This is no surprise to many of us. We experience suffering in relationships, through disease and death, and seeing the world run by and for those in power. Remembering the truth found in John 1:5 and the resurrection of Jesus allows us to have faith that, in the words of Frederick Buechner, "the madness and lostness we see all around us and within us are not the last truth about the world but only the next to the last truth."



Reflect

Consider today how the light of Christ may shine in the darkness around you. Are there times in your life when you've accepted the darkness into which you may be called to carry the light of Christ? How might practicing the four tenets of The Advent of Freedom bring light into our dark world?

Pray

Jesus, Light of the World, during this Advent season, may we not ignore or fear darkness. Help us to see that the same light that came into the world 2,000 years ago still shines in us today. When we grow weary, strengthen our hearts. When we feel despair, encourage us through community and Your words. Where there is darkness, lead us to be light. Amen.

Tuesday, November 30

Read

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness. (Jeremiah 33:14-16)

It was too dark to see much hope. Our leaders were too susceptible to corruption, our hearts too inclined to selfishness, our affections too prone to idolatry. God told us to repent, but we chose to believe a lie; that it's too hard to return to your first Love when you've loved something new. So we ended up here, exiled in Babylon. Here, it's too dark to see any hope. They want to change our names and our worship. Our homes and our daughter have been stolen. Our identity is slowly slipping away to Babylon's message of "Assimilate! Assimilate!..."

This is the context into which Jeremiah speaks his message. He reminds God's people that God has not forgotten His promises. That there is a future because the line of King David will be restored. The new King will restore justice and righteousness. Jeremiah dared God's people to risk believing in hope when there was no evidence of it. He challenged them to believe that their hope, salvation, justice, and future were wrapped up in the story of this Righteous King.

He dared them to believe that living out that hope in exile was worth the risk.



Reflect

We know that this Righteous King is Jesus. Like God's people in Babylon, our hope, our salvation, our justice, and our future are intricately tied to His story. Like God's people in Babylon, it's hard to hold on to hope when things feel hopeless and culture pressures us. But the story isn't over. God's not done. Come back to Jeremiah's words throughout your day. Let them challenge you to risk and redirect your hope.

Pray

God, my heart is too inclined to selfishness, my affections too prone to idolatry, and my life too susceptible to corruption. I can too easily give into the pressure of assimilating to the culture. Too often I place my hope in the false promises of its idols. Forgive me, Father. Thank You for Your Son. Without Him, I'd be left alone with my weak substitutes for hope. Please give me the courage to have true hope even when it's hard. Amen.

Wednesday, December 1

Read

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1:5-10)

The Advent (**CHRIST**mas) season is my favorite time of year, but I always have to wait for it. And then it's a season of waiting... in lines, in traffic, for packages to arrive, for gatherings, and for glimpses of hope and encouragement.

Zechariah and Elizabeth understood what it felt like to wait for hope and encouragement. Although both were from priestly lines, and lived righteous and blameless before the Lord, Elizabeth was unable to have children. But God! Often we're deprived of something in the here-and-now because God has something better for us in the future. Zechariah and Elizabeth wanted a child and faithfully prayed for one, but what they received was more than they could have imagined – a prophet.

Advent means coming. Something we look forward to but that's not here yet. It's not uncommon for us to feel like God is running late in our lives. I often wish in my own life that the Lord would do



more and do it faster. As a church planter I wanted a certain sized team on a specific timeline. But the Lord knew exactly who we needed and when we needed them. Our team didn't just sit around waiting though, and neither were Zechariah and the people of God. In the meantime, they faithfully served Him, praying with great anticipation.

This might be a season of waiting for you. Maybe even a long season of waiting...But God is still in control.

Reflect

What circumstance, relationship, career move, or worry do you need to surrender to His perfect timing? Trust His timing this season. Pray with anticipation. God is never late!

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for always showing up on time, for fulfilling every promise You have ever made, and for having every detail of my life in Your loving hands. Help me to trust Your perfect timing through this season and into the new year. Amen.

Read

"On the right side of the altar of incense an angel of the Lord appeared. This terrified Zechariah and he fell before him out of fear. The angel said, "Zechariah, don't be afraid because your prayers have been heard! Your wife Elizabeth will have a son and you will call his name John. There will be a lot of joy, celebration, and many will be glad. Many of the sons of Israel will return to the Lord, his God. He will go before God in the spirit and power of Elijah and turn the fathers' hearts to their children and the disobedient to an attitude of righteousness. He will prepare people for the Lord." (Luke 1:11-17)

Seeing the angel at the altar must have terrified this priest—no one else was allowed into this special place. This must be a divine act. Yet even more divine was the promise that God not only heard his and Elizabeth's prayers (they were childless) but that their son would one day lead people back to God. There was hope for the people of Israel!

In a time when people's hearts were captivated by the mighty empire of power, false peace, and materialism; a faithful couple was told that their son would do God's work. Lives would change!

Christmas has always been counter-cultural. A Christian holiday celebrated intentionally during the height of paganism. The early church made the decision to celebrate our King on December 25, the birthday of Mithras and the worship of Saturn. Christmas was an in-your-face celebration stating that God intervenes in time and space with a promise to turn people back to their Lord.

Christmas boldly states that lives can change.



Reflect

The empires of power, false peace, materialism, and consumerism seeks to capture our hearts and distract us from the daily presence of God, especially during this season of Advent. How are you praying for God to appear in your life this Christmas? Where are you longing to see a message of hope?

Pray

Lord, You appear where no one else is allowed and sometimes that is the altar of my heart. You also appear in our lives to offer us hope. You cut through time and space to remind us that people can turn to You, even in the dark times. May we fall before You in love and go before You in faithfulness. Amen.

Friday, December 3

Read

And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

(Luke 1:18-25)

When we juxtapose the situation of Zechariah to that of Abraham's, we can hardly miss the parallels: God promises both a son (Genesis 15:4-5; 17:15-16; Luke 1:13), both their wives are unable to have children (Genesis 11:30;16:2; Luke 1:7). Both men are well advanced in age (Genesis 17:1, 17; Luke 1:7, 18), Then, both men respond the same to God's promise: Abraham: "How shall I know?" (Genesis 15:8), Zechariah: "How shall I know?" (Luke 1:18).

Though God's response to each is radically different. In response to Abraham, God provides a covenant ceremony. Zechariah ends up

mute and deaf. Perhaps Zechariah had begun losing hope in God's desire to answer prayer. Maybe in the busyness of his work he stopped spending time in communion with *El Shaddai, God Almighty*, the One who powerfully intervenes changing circumstances when they seem beyond hope, just as for Abraham (Genesis 17:1). If God had done it before, He could certainly do it again.

Perhaps the gift of silence was God's grace to Zechariah as an invitation to be still before Him and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10). Maybe God gifted Zechariah with not just a baby, but with the sacred space of stopping and considering the wonder of the God who still meets His creatures' deepest desires.

You may find yourself in a season of hopelessness and constant busyness. Richard Foster comments that, "our Adversary the devil majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in 'muchness' and 'manyness,' he will rest satisfied."

Perhaps this season God is extending you the same invitation as the grace given to Zechariah, to slow down and know that He is *God Almighty*.

Reflect

In what ways can you intentionally slow down and spend time with the One who can meet you and powerfully intervene in whatever you are facing, just as He did for Abraham and Zechariah?

Pray

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forgive us for getting so caught up in the busyness of life that we fail to make spending time with You a priority. Grant us the grace to trust You enough to intentionally carve out space for prayer and silence with You. May we be surprised with wonder in discerning Your presence in the midst of life's demands this season. Amen.

Saturday, December 4

Read

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38)

The story of Mary is a stunning one. A young woman of no reputation or status is visited by an angel and informed that she will become pregnant, by the Holy Spirit, with the *Son of God*. She will carry in her body the Savior of the world, the King all of Israel has been waiting for. Just as amazing to me, though, is the proof Gabriel offers that such a thing is possible. Mary's old and barren

cousin Elizabeth is six months pregnant!

Elizabeth, unlike Mary, is a woman of standing and reputation. She is the wife of a temple priest and a daughter of Aaron, meaning her lineage, like her husband's, could be traced back to him. Despite that, she did not and could not have children, which would have been a source of great shame for a wife in those days. But after many years, God, in Elizabeth's words, "looked with favor upon" her and "took away [her] disgrace among men." (Luke 1:25)

If Mary had any concerns about the scandal or costs of being pregnant and unwed, she could look to her cousin—humiliated for much of her married life, but never left or forsaken.

Mary holds out courage. Elizabeth offers hope. One helps me face the mystery of a life with Christ. The other reminds me that because of Christ, my circumstances don't have the last word; that even in the darkest places, I am seen and not forgotten in God's story. Both women inspire me to greater faith.

Reflect

Which woman challenges you most? Is it Mary, willing to move forward into the unseen, or Elizabeth, living with hope despite her situation?

Pray

Abba, You have said that You would never leave or forsake me. Remind me daily that no matter where I am, You are with me, rejoicing over me, and calling me Yours. Amen.

Week 2: THE FREEDOM TO WORSHIP FULLY

December 5-11

The Advent season is our chance to celebrate the wondrous moment when God entered our world to make things right. Advent is a season of worship! Yet, the Christmas season comes at us with so many other ways on which to spend our time, money, and energy that leave Jesus out of the picture. Let us remember that God is inviting each of us to declutter our hearts of the things that rob us from worshipping Jesus.

Scripture Focus

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!
(Psalm 150:6)

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet... 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.' (Luke 3:4)

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Ephesians 5:19-20)

Reflection Questions & Practices

LOOK UP

Read the story of Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:67-79 where he worships God. What is it about God that Zechariah can't help but proclaim and worship?

OWN UP

As beautiful as Zechariah's worship is, we often find ourselves in the Christmas season worshipping other things instead of Jesus. What are some things besides Jesus you see yourself, and the culture, worshipping this time of year?

LINK UP

Make a commitment to intentionally increase the time you spend worshipping God this month. Set aside an amount of time daily to worship Jesus. (Examples: Read the Bible and praise God for what you learn about him. Write out a list of things for which you are thankful to God. Take a walk outside and acknowledge God's beautiful creation. Engage with songs of worship. Sit quietly in prayer, acknowledging the goodness of God.)

Heavenly Father, there is nothing more I want than for my life to give You worship above all other things. Help me in this season to be aware of lesser things my heart desires above You and help me replace them with a deeper understanding of how great You are!
Amen.

Prayer

Week 2: DEVOTIONAL READINGS

Monday, December 6

Read

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:18-21)

Almost every family has black sheep. A rebel who can't seem to toe the line, another is making news because of an embarrassing antic. They are the ones in the family picture that others step away from so they are not too closely affiliated.

Jesus had black sheep in His family. When we read through Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1, we find prostitutes, adulterers, murderers, idol worshipers, and every other sort of black sheep. Not the kind of pedigree we might expect for the Savior of the world.

And then there's Mary. Mary is found to be with child before marriage – a stigma in any society. We know how that news landed on her fiancé Joseph. He was embarrassed. He had in mind to leave her "quietly."



In His sovereignty, God cleared up the matter for Joseph in a dream, but what of the rest of Mary's family? Her closest friends? Her community? It's likely that Jesus walked under a cloud of shame all His life because some could never accept such a fantastical story as a virgin conception. In their minds, Mary, and Jesus Himself, would always be black sheep.

God is apparently perfectly OK with that. In fact, black sheep are exactly the sort of people Jesus came for: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus really had no other option than to come through a family tree with broken branches, a family tree like yours and mine. Every one of us is a black sheep. But thank God for the perfect Lamb who came to save black sheep like you and me.

Reflect

Who comes to your mind as the black sheep of your family? Is it you? How does Jesus' mission to save people from their sins change your view of black sheep?

Pray

Jesus, thank You for coming as a perfect Lamb to save black sheep like me. Wash me with Your precious blood and make me white as snow. Amen.

Tuesday, December 7

Read

Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled: Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him, Emmanuel. (Emmanuel means "God with us.") When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus. (Matthew 1:22-25)

Waiting is hard.

Most often, we have the ability to get whatever we want or need in an extremely quick and easy way. Due to this convenience, we have become extremely impatient. As we find ourselves in the midst of the hustle and bustle of this advent season, patience seems to be one of the first things to go. Yet, as we come together to Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, and Love All, patience is one of the key aspects needed to fully embrace and live out this countercultural movement.

The scripture for today declares that "Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled." This took over 500 years of patiently waiting for the coming of Emmanuel to break into space and time, so that God could be with us and, ultimately, save us.



Reflect

As you move through the day, look for opportunities to be a co-conspirator for the transformation of the world by slowing down and waiting.

Pray

Almighty God, allow me to slow down and wait on You. Stir up within me, a vision of Your kingdom coming in the stillness and quiet moments of life. Make me a conspirator with You for the transformation of this world. Amen.

Wednesday, December 8

Read

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). (Isaiah 7:14)

In a busy world, Jesus invades humanity with a God-sized announcement. You could focus on so many things within this promise. You could look at the power of the immaculate conception. You could hone in on the fact that God gave a sign to those who were seeking for Him.

Also interesting is the idea that Jesus was given a new name. He was given the name Immanuel which means God is with Us.

Here is what I would settle my heart upon during advent; that Jesus is God with us. He invaded a broken world. A world that deserved judgement and rebuke. And what does God provide? He provides Himself.



Reflect

I would hope in the midst of the chaos of this fractured world you could settle in your heart that Jesus is God's answer to you and me. Our only response is to worship the God who is with us. He's not afraid of our brokenness. We are not so messy that God doesn't want to commune with us. He comes to us as the God who will and can help us get back to right standing.

Pray

Jesus, thank You for loving us enough to humble Yourself and identify with us. Thank You for being with us and giving us a path back to God through your sacrifice! Amen.

Thursday, December 9

Read

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

(Luke 1:39-45)

It is exciting when you find out that you're going to have a child. You start thinking about who you are going to tell and when you are going to tell them. In today's culture many parents wait a number of weeks before sharing this news with others. For our family, my wife usually tells her parents first.

Now imagine young Mary. The angel Gabriel has told her that she is going to bring the Son of God into the world. Will she wait for a few months before she will tell anyone her news? Can she keep this a secret? How long will she wait?

"A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea." (Luke 1:39)

Where would she go? Who will she tell? Who would believe her? Who would understand her? Elizabeth. She would go to a relative, Elizabeth, who "has become pregnant in her old age." (verse 36) Of course, Elizabeth would understand Mary because God has just



given her a miraculous child at an old age. Elizabeth was carrying the child that would herald the King and Mary is carrying the King.

The Good News is that Jesus has come into the world at this season of Advent. Mary couldn't wait to tell of the coming news of Jesus! Like Mary, we should be so moved by this that we are hurrying to tell others of Jesus too.

Reflect

Will you keep Jesus and what He has done in your life a secret this year? How can you begin to share this good news with others?

Pray

Jesus, thank You for coming as a baby into this world. We look forward to Your second coming as a King. Amen.

Friday, December 10

Read

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. (Luke 1:46-56)

Mary's song is known by many as the Magnificat, which is a Latin word meaning, "to magnify". This beautiful song arose spontaneously from Mary after the words said by Elizabeth, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished."

When I imagine Mary and Elizabeth in this moment, I see an almost visceral energy circulating around these two remarkable women, both pregnant with a promise that would not only change their own lives, but all of human history. Yet, it's important to remember that Mary's song was offered well before she had received what was promised. She did not wait to give thanks. She



did not wait to tell of God's goodness. She did not wait to share her joy.

It can feel vulnerable and risky to share our own stories before we have received what has been promised. We are tempted to wait to give thanks until we can be sure that what we heard whispered in our hearts was true after all. I have seen how doubt can at times be a healthy friend on the journey of seeking God, but when we allow doubt to close our hands in fear rather than open them in worship and awe, we are missing out on the joy of truly trusting in God.

Mary's trust in God's promise is a gift to us. When I read her song, I feel braver in my own faith. That is the power of joyful, genuine worship. It echoes longer and reaches farther than we may ever know.

Reflect

Have you ever worshiped God in the midst of unfinished stories and unfulfilled promises? Was the joy worth the risk of trusting?

Pray

God, we confess that we have not always believed what You have promised. We have not always chosen to take You at Your word. We have missed out on the true joy and hope that comes from trusting You. May our hearts gain courage in the middle of our stories, worshipping You boldly so that our joy in Christ might be multiplied. Amen.

Read

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David. (Luke 1:68-69)

It is often said that "patience is a virtue." But when is it okay to give up patience? After 10 minutes? A year? A decade? A century??? The Israelites waited hundreds of years for God to raise up a mighty savior. Generations waited in hope. The Israelites did not give up on God's promise.

After generations of waiting, Zechariah was visited by an angel of God who came with an astonishing message. Your long wait is over. Your hope is fulfilled. The Messiah is near. God is entering the world in a new way that will fulfill hope and renew grace. Imagine that. Zechariah's response to this astounding news is to shout a blessing. What a blessing he was to receive.

Today we have grown increasingly impatient.

We want what we want right now. That leaves little room for hope and trust that God will respond. Have you ever given up hope in God? In a world of quick responses, it is easy to give up on God when God doesn't respond as quickly as Siri, Alexa, or Amazon Prime. But what would it look like to be patient and not lose hope?



Reflect

Imagine what blessings God has in store for you when you surrender and practice patience like Zechariah. Practicing patience does not mean waiting a lifetime; it means being still and waiting for God's wisdom which always comes.

Pray

Almighty God, grant me patience in my busy life to look for and listen to You. As You were present in the world in the Incarnation, be present with me, that I may know the joys and blessings that You offer in this season. Amen.

Week 3: THE FREEDOM TO SPEND LESS

December 12-18

Christmas is about celebrating the gift of Jesus, not a big pile of presents under the tree. One of our goals this year is to spend less so we can save money and help those who needs it. When we have grateful hearts and share our blessings with other people, we can live joyfully knowing we are reflecting the life of Jesus. This is the heart of advent. More than just an invitation to say no to overspending, it's an invitation to a new way of life that is free from the burden of consumeristic addiction.

Scripture

Focus

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35)

Reflection Questions & Practices

LOOK UP

Matthew 6:19-21 tells us to seek “treasures in heaven”.
Philippians 3:7-11 gives us some insight into what those treasures may be. Read Philippians 3:7-11. Write down what Paul believes are his greatest “heavenly treasures”.

OWN UP

How do your spending habits reflect your heart? If others could see your gift-giving habits, what would they assume were your highest priorities and treasures in life? How could you use the tradition of gift-giving as a tool to bring you and others closer to God?

LINK UP

Consider challenging everyone in your household to:

- Give and receive at least one less gift this Christmas.
- Set aside the money in a collection jar.
- After Christmas, consider someone in need to bless with what has been collected. Make it a household event to deliver it.

Heavenly Father, if I’m honest, I am prone to make Christmas more gifts of earthly value rather than it is about sharing Your love with others. By the power of Your Spirit, please give me a passion, strategy, and creativity to take the tradition of gift-giving and do it in such a way that highlights YOU as our greatest treasure.
Amen.

Prayer

Week 3: DEVOTIONAL READINGS

Monday, December 13

Read

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. (Luke 2:1-5)

At the start of the Christmas story, Joseph believes that Mary has been unfaithful to him, and he initially plans to divorce from her. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that an angel appears to Joseph, convincing him to stay (Matthew 1:18-24). God has a role in the Christmas story for Joseph. He wants Joseph to stay with Mary and help her raise this child, the Messiah. God’s plans for Joseph are bigger than he can imagine at this one moment.

We can imagine this wasn’t an easy decision for Joseph – gossip and shame would have followed this young couple everywhere. But Joseph is faithful to this calling from God.

Mary and Joseph get word about the upcoming census and Joseph takes the risk of bringing Mary and their unborn son to Bethlehem. In the midst of a difficult to explain situation, Joseph sticks by Mary and leads her to Bethlehem, where the Christ child will soon be born.

As we think about this passage, Joseph’s example can inspire us to



be faithful in our own relationship with God. It may be that God is asking us to do something difficult, or something that others won't fully understand. But we trust that God knows what He is doing, and that He has given each of us a role to play in the story of salvation that He is writing.

Reflect

Is God calling you to do something difficult? How can you be faithful to the work He wants you to do? What is one step you can take today to be obedient to God's call?

Pray

Lord, thank You for the example of Joseph who obeyed Your will even when it wasn't easy. Give me the courage this week to listen to Your voice and follow in whatever direction You call me. Help me to trust that Your will is better than mine. Provide all that I need to do the work You are asking me to do. Amen.

Tuesday, December 14

Read

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2:6-7)

Two sentences, a couple of dozen words – that's all Luke uses to describe the birth of the Son of God. None of what we would expect for the birth of a king. But perhaps that's the point. And we can probably learn much from the words Luke did include.

This line really speaks to me: *"She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."*

Of the few details Luke shares, this is perhaps the most striking...and most important. For while it is unbelievable to most of us that no one made room for this expectant mother, this kind of thing happens all the time. Refugees, immigrants, the poor... Does it matter – to the world, to us – if they are pregnant or not, sick or not, hungry or not, the same race or not?

Jesus was born, not only like all of us, but particularly like the most vulnerable of us. God comes to redeem all, and God starts with those most in need. Jesus is found not in the capital city but in a backwoods town, not in the inn but in the stable, not sleeping on fine linens but laid in an ordinary manger with cloth.

I'll never forget the moment my wife and I found out we were



having a baby. Nine months later, not everything went the way we had planned or hoped they would have, but he was here. Out came this little brown eyed boy, my son. One of the greatest moments of my life.

My son isn't Jesus, but when I look at the face of my son, I see Jesus. I am reminded of our Creator.

Reflect

What if we started looking at people like this during the Christmas season? What if God opened our eyes to see the hurting people all around us?

Pray

Heavenly Father, You came once in the form of a vulnerable and helpless child, delivered to an ordinary mother and father, in order to redeem the world. Come again into our hearts, that we may see You in the face of all those in need. Amen.

Read

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12)

Imagine for a moment being one of those shepherds. You are going about your job, looking after the sheep, you like the solitary. However, the people in the nearby town don't really respect you. Other shepherds haven't helped. People think you are smelly, a likely thief, a bit odd and not deserving of much respect.

Then in the stillness of the night, out of the blue, an amazing power surrounds you, God's glory is in your midst.

How would you feel? Would you be terrified like the shepherds or comforted?

When I look back on my life and I have been placed in the presence of powerful people with authority, I have been like those shepherds. Terrified that I might be in trouble. Terrified that I might mess things up. Terrified that I might be criticized. And as a pastor at times I meet people who feel the same about God. They worry that God will criticize, condemn and even punish them.



But God has a different message for us, just like he had for the shepherds.

God's angel says: "Don't be afraid, I bring you good news that will bring great joy for all the people" This good news is that God uses His power and authority not to condemn or terrify people, but to give us Jesus, who gives us the real gift of Christmas, the gift of a loving life with God forever.

So being in God's presence leads to joy not fear, when we truly hear from God.

Reflect

As you spend time with God, take notice of the good news God gives you, that you can share with everyone you know.

Pray

Almighty God, thank You for using Your power and glory to give us the good news of Christmas, may everyone know You by Your good news. Amen.

Read

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!" (Luke 2:13–14)

Life is full of *and suddenly* moments. Moments in time that can forever change our perspective. When *and suddenly* moments appear, they can come in all shapes and sizes. They can be full of surprise, delight, joy, and healing but they can also be full of hurt, brokenness, despair, fear, and anguish.

For the shepherds who experienced this *and suddenly* moment their first reaction was one of fear but then peace settled in. Peace, the Shalom of God. In John 14:27 Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

It's not difficult to experience His peace in those joyful moments that happen suddenly. To run into an old friend unexpectedly or to receive an unexpected promotion or encouragement.

These are the good *and suddenlys* that are welcomed with much delight.

But what about the other kind? When the car appears out of nowhere or we receive a phone call with devastating news. Maybe we go to our place of employment to find out we have been let go, or the sudden death of someone dearly loved. No matter what the



circumstance this one thing remains. His peace will be there, overshadowing, hovering over the pain.

He is always present.

Reflect

Have you experienced any *and suddenly* moments recently? I want to encourage you, His peace is in the chaos. He is always present with you in the moment. He cares deeply for you.

Pray

Father, help me to reach out to You during my *and suddenly* moments, knowing that You care and that Your peace is there in every moment of my life.
Amen.

Read

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.
(Luke 2:15-18)

In today's reading, the heavenly host returns to its heavenly abode, and the shepherds are left to decide what to do with the good news that has just been delivered in such wildly improbable fashion. They could have laughed the whole thing off as a kind of mass hallucination, or been so struck with fear that they couldn't even stand let alone walk into Bethlehem, but they believe that God has spoken to them, and they resolve to see for themselves what they have heard.

And so they find the promised child lying in a manger, and while we are told little about their encounter with the new family, we are told that they immediately set out to spread the word concerning all they have seen and heard.

In that moment they take on the role of the angels, messengers of God, declaring the birth of a savior, just as it had been declared to them.



Reflect

What have you seen and heard of that child lying in a manger? How might you take on the role of the angels this Christmas? Who needs to hear this Good News?

Pray

God, like the shepherds who were first at the manger, may we seek out and hear the good news. May we become messengers of God, declaring that the One who saves is among us. May all who hear us be amazed and become seekers and messengers in their turn. Amen.

Saturday, December 18

Read

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. (Luke 2:19-20)

The shepherds left their visit glorifying and rejoicing about what they had just experienced. It was all true, the angel's song was true!

In the midst of everything going on around her, Mary treasured and pondered all that she had heard in her heart. Imagine her expectation about her son's life! She was already preparing to meet Him and see everything that Jesus would do.

My wife often jokes about me saying that the words I use the most in our marriage are "Did you see the...?" or "Where is the...?" I forget and misplace things all over my home. I am always asking what to do next, because I don't know where the things I need are. But there is something more that my heart needs, and it has to be my main treasure, I can't forget where its place is.

Today, with so many screens flashing in front of us, fighting for our attention, and so much information available, it becomes more difficult to focus on what's important to keep in your heart. Too many things have a little bit of our attention for a short period of time. We must keep the Gospel above them.

If the Gospel is out of place in the room of our heart, the whole life



becomes a mess. Do not let the Gospel be in your heart like a forgotten garment in the corner of the room or under some other object. Make Jesus the foundation, the walls, and the decoration of your heart.

Reflect

Whatever you do today, let it emerge from the joy that comes from meditation and celebration of the good news. The good news should be the most visible thing in our lives. Take time to treasure it and ponder what God has done in your life already.

Pray

Lord, help me to treasure the Gospel as my main thought through all my days. May Christ rule over all my feelings. Give me courage and wisdom to be Your witness. Amen.

Week 4: THE FREEDOM TO GIVE MORE

December 19-23

With His birth, Jesus models for us the ultimate act of inconvenience. Far from just giving a token of His love, Jesus gives us Himself that we might know the grace and mercy of God. Giving more is all about giving in a way that requires inconvenience. This type of giving requires a part of ourselves. Instead of giving more stuff, how is Jesus calling you to give more of yourself?

Scripture Focus

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Reflection Questions & Practices

LOOK UP

Read Matthew 1:18-25 and Isaiah 7:14. What do these passages tell us about the way that God gives and the way He comes to save?

OWN UP

Where are you most tempted to give a convenient gift this Christmas? What would it look like to love in a way that interrupts your schedule?

LINK UP

Serve a neighbor in a way that requires you to be with them. Rake leaves, take out their garbage, bake cookies etc. As you do, pray that God would give you the ability to see them through His eyes. What do you see?

Jesus, I am in awe of the way You constantly humbled and gave Yourself away to the world. Thank You that I have salvation today because of the gracious way You chose to serve us. Lord, I want to be like You in the ways You love others. Strengthen my heart today to live in a way that considers others above myself. Help me see the many opportunities You create for me to serve others. Amen.

Prayer

Week 4: DEVOTIONAL READINGS

Monday, December 20

Read

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:1-2)

"We have come to worship him" was the reason the Magi gave as to why they came to see Jesus. They came to worship a king who had been born, but not just any king, a king who came to bring change to the world.

How can we worship Jesus while at the same time bringing change to the world around us? It's not about a song. It's not about a religious ritual. Real worship and real change happens when we sacrifice. Our faith is increased when we understand the power of sacrifice.

On a trip to Zimbabwe, I witnessed the ultimate sacrifice during a Sunday service. The time came to take up an offering which in my mind was an act of futility. With over 85% unemployment and through the struggles of life people there were facing, person after person contributed something to the offering. And they gave with complete joy! Not reluctantly or out of guilt. They sacrificed what they had to participate in the Kingdom of God.

Like the Magi, they came to worship him. They came to worship Jesus and bring a change to the world through their willingness to sacrifice.



The Magi sacrificed time and personal wealth to worship Jesus. They honored him with what they had. We may not have the resources like the Magi, but the value of worship is not measured by the amount we give, it is measured by the willingness to present what we have. I am always struck by the words of the Christmas carol, *The Little Drummer Boy*, because all he gave was what he had. He asked if he could drum for the king.

Reflect

How will you worship the King this year? What can you sacrifice to bring change to someone's life?

Pray

Jesus, give me a spirit of worship this Advent season. Help me to use my resources, my talents, and my gifts to serve others in Your name. Amen.

Tuesday, December 21

Read

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.""

(Matthew 2:3-6)

Yesterday we read about the Magi from the East, who, upon noticing the first Christmas star ornamenting the night sky, set out on a journey to seek the Messiah and worship Him. In stark contrast, here we read that when King Herod and "all Jerusalem" heard about Jesus' birth, they were "disturbed."

Disturbed! A big word that in its original Greek can mean agitated, stirred-up, troubled and afraid.

Isn't it interesting that you don't have to look far to see the same wide spectrum of responses to Jesus' birth today? You may not even have to look past your own family to see such different reactions to Jesus.

And yet, nobody could argue with Micah's prophecy, written some 700 years earlier (Micah 5). Herod demanded answers, and a voice from the past echoed truth down long corridors of time. Maybe if Herod had not been so worried about losing his status, his position, his rule, his perceived *control*, he might've noticed something



sweetly significant in that last prophetic sentence.

“...a ruler who will *shepherd* my people Israel.”

This Ruler is different.

He’s come to lead alright, but in the humblest way. On the list of “dirty jobs” it doesn’t get much worse than shepherding. What kind of Ruler loves like this?

Reflect

These days I’m asking, what am I so worried about losing that I’d let it keep me from seeking my Messiah and worshiping Him? What about you? What are you holding onto so tightly that the idea of Jesus ruling your life is, frankly, unsettling? Disturbing? He wants to feed you, lead you, love and tenderly care for you.

Pray

Lord Jesus, help me to let go of anything that comes between me and You. You deserve my wholehearted worship! Amen.

Read

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” (Matthew 2:7-8)

The plot is thickening as the anticipation of the coming savior, Jesus Christ, begins to attract a different audience. The magnitude of His birth is no longer just for worshipers. Now someone else is paying attention.

Have you ever noticed that as soon as you’ve focused your heart on Jesus, how much interference comes your way? Herod the soon to be originator of a death decree for all male children under two years old is beginning his quest with a question and some encouragement. The question is *where is the King Child?* The encouragement is *go search carefully for Him*. The beginning of treachery is wrapped around a desire to worship.

Even within the context of evil, God is sovereign. Herod has no desire to worship the newborn King, Jesus Christ. Instead he feels threatened by His arrival and he implements the treacherous plan to rid Jesus from the scene.

Can I stop you for a moment because it’s so easy to be appalled at



Herod's actions to kill off the Savior under the guise of wanting to worship; however, how's our heart when it comes to complete surrender to God?

What are we harboring in our heart? Are we giving Him our secret struggles?

Reflect

Worship is a heart issue. The secrets of our heart are known by God even if they are not articulated by us. Let's let nothing be in competition with our sincere worship of God. We will search carefully for Him knowing He will be found.

Pray

God, help me to yield myself completely to You in worship. Help me come boldly to You knowing You are fully aware of my brokenness and let me trust You in the midst of my competing interests. I surrender. Amen.

Read

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (Matthew 2:9-12)

Such familiar words!

Wise men from afar finally found the little family, worshipped Jesus and presented gifts. I'd have taken nappies, Babygro's, and blankets plus a casserole for the parents, but I'd have been wrong. These men were spot on, gold would provide for that refugee family for two years, frankincense would repel desert insects from tender infant skin, and myrrh would serve as baby oil keeping him clean and comfortable.

Practical gifts, but also gifts with the messages we sing of every year. Gold denotes majesty – this child was born King of the Jews, and now reigns in Heaven. Priests used incense to worship God – this child was God come down to earth, and now is seated in Heaven. Myrrh was used to prepare bodies for burial – this child, both King and God, was born to die – and to rise!



The men wouldn't fully understand what those gifts meant, but gave them anyway. Magi, named because they dealt in magic which was never part of God's purposes for His people, and yet they and their gifts were welcomed and accepted.

This was how God showed the world that all are welcome, no matter our age, gender, or race, no matter where we have been, have believed, or have done in the past, Jesus came for all, and wants all of us to come to Him – He will accept us.

Reflect

Have you let the words and promises of Jesus settle into your heart?

Pray

Loving God, You know me and accept me, just as You knew and accepted the wise men who worshipped Jesus. May that knowledge so thrill me, that I make time to worship You daily, giving you the gifts of my love and my life, even when I don't fully understand what that may mean. Amen.

Week 5: THE FREEDOM TO LOVE ALL

December 24-25

The birth of Christ is the incredible act of a HOLY GOD coming to rescue poor, needy, desperate, and broken-hearted people. He lived His life caring for the needs of the poor, healing the wounds of the afflicted, and loving those who felt unlovable. When it was all said and done, He stood back, and told them that these acts were only the beginning of something greater He could bring them: SALVATION. As we celebrate the glorious love of God we must remember that His ministry is not done. Instead, He looks to His sons and daughters to ask if we will continue His work of caring for those in need as a sign and message of the salvation Christ gives freely.

Scripture Focus

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Luke 4:18-19

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:25-27

Reflection Questions & Practices

LOOK UP

Read Matthew 25:34-40. In what ways are acts of service a gift to Jesus?

OWN UP

What is your gut reaction when you hear people talking about issues such as poverty, disease, hunger, slavery, and education? Overwhelmed? Skeptical? Excited? Apathetic? Why?

LINK UP

Find someone in need of basic provision. Meet their need and share the message of Christ's hope.

- Purchase or find extra food in your pantry to take to a local food bank or shelter.
- Purchase a warm meal and warm clothes for a homeless friend you see on the street. Share the love of Christ with them.
- Support local non-profits and charities that care for an area of need you want to see answered in our community. Consider a financial gift or volunteering your time to support them.

Heavenly Father, remind me today that You not only love and save me, You came to love and save ALL the world. Empower me today to love and serve ALL people as a reminder of how much You love us. Amen.

Prayer

Week 5: DEVOTIONAL READINGS

Friday, December 24

Read

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

(Galatians 4:4-7)

God as my Father?

This was such a foreign concept to me when I began to learn about God. I grew up in a home without a father. Not just an absent father, but a father that abandoned his family for another. So the idea of worshipping a God who said He wanted to be my Father was a bit scary and not something I was interested in.

As a child and a young adult I struggled with feeling good enough, worthy of unconditional love and worth sticking around for. I made terrible life choices that continued to feed into that mindset.

But as I came face to face with God and His heart and desires for me, my life was changed!

God began to do things in my life that were so full of love, forgiveness, and hope that I couldn't help but want to know Him more. As I studied God's word and was loved on by God's people, I saw His unconditional love for me. The love of a Father that I had



always desired. He began to heal the deep wounds in my life and show me where His goodness was in all those times I was completely hopeless and broken.

And today I stand on the truth in Galatians 4:7- “..you are no longer a slave but God’s own child.” I am no longer a slave/victim to the brokenness I grew up in, but I am a victor IN Christ!

I challenge you today to look at your life.

Reflect

From what has God freed you? What are the beautiful inheritances He is sharing with you as His child?

Pray

Father, thank You for being my Dad! Thank You for Your unconditional love for me. I love You. Amen.

Read

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. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.
(Isaiah 9:6-7)

It’s hard to imagine, in this day of polarity in politics, a government so amazing that we would consider good news the fact that it would never end. Can you picture an earthly kingdom characterized by justice and righteousness – always and forever? It’s a stretch, isn’t it?

When we consider some of the most successful kingdoms throughout the Earth’s history, with the happiest subjects, the fairest laws, the lowest taxes... all have eventually proven flawed by the corruption of power and ambition, weak or greedy leaders, restless, rebellious people or some combination of our universal brokenness.

No matter how good a government may seem for a time, it’s clear that mere humans, even with the best intentions, have never been/will never be able to accomplish this sort of ideal civilization. It’s impossible. Only God could accomplish this.



But look at the good news of this passage: that's just what God did!

Through the birth of this one babe, this child, God established His Kingdom – overflowing with justice, righteousness and peace with no end, and ruled by the most Wonderful Counselor, the Mightiest God, the Everlasting Father, and Prince of all Peace.

There is one more name for this perfect King, the ruler of this shockingly perfect eternal kingdom. It is "Jesus" and we don't have to wait for some distant future in which He will reign. No, King Jesus reigns now and forever.

If you are a subject of King Jesus, living in His kingdom and under His authority, you already know the goodness of His reign. If not, you are invited to join Him, to be a part of the beautiful Kingdom where justice, righteousness and peace will never end.

What are you waiting for?

Reflect

If you are a subject of King Jesus, in what ways do you experience His reign every day? In what areas of your life do you struggle to submit to His authority?

Pray

Jesus, thank You for inviting me to be a part of Your glorious Kingdom. Help me to submit to Your authority in every part of my life so that I may experience Your reign of justice and peace. Amen.

CHURCH IN ACTION

Sunday, December 26

What an incredible journey this study has been for us as a church! We hope you have been resourced to build a lasting foundation of how to celebrate God during the Advent season for years to come.

As we come to the end of our study, we must remind ourselves that God didn't JUST TALK about serving the world. He actually PUT HIS LOVE INTO ACTION. In the same way, we don't want to end our study with only TALK. Instead, we want to put into action what it means to BE CHRIST'S CHURCH.

To culminate our series on "The Advent of Freedom", we will practice what it means to be a people of freedom by forgoing our Sunday gatherings to BE THE CHURCH in our community. On December 26, we will have no formal gatherings at LCC. Instead, LCC will provide a Church In Action handout that will challenge each of us to spend the morning blessing our communities in the name of Jesus. You will be provided several activities that will take you around your community and encourage you to love others in word and deed.

For more information, visit the LCC website:
www.lighthousehome.org/advent.

Church In Action handouts will be available for pick-up:

- at our Christmas Eve gatherings.
- on the morning of December 26 outside in the portico of our main building.

We cannot wait to hear all the stories of how God used you on December 26 to share His love with your community!

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

(Ephesians 2:10)

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(Matthew 5:14-16)

Scripture Focus