

Advent

2020

anthem
CAMARILLO

An Introduction to Advent

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman... to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Galatians 4:4-7

At the heart of the Christian story is the drama of Advent, the wonder of Christmas. We believe that God himself became one of us. Little baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was God in flesh. He came, lived and died so that we might truly live. And never die. He came so that we might become children of God and thus enjoy God forever!

Advent is a season in the church calendar that looks back to what theologians call *the incarnation of Jesus*. The second person of the triune God became a man, but before that, a baby, and before that, a *fetus* inside his mother's womb.

The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning *coming* or *arrival*. The word is deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, we celebrate the first advent of Jesus, his birth in Israel. Yet we also focus on the second advent, or coming, of Jesus when he will rule and reign on earth as he already rules and reigns in heaven.

The celebration of Advent is not a biblical mandate, but rather a helpful reminder of *who* we are and *whose* we are. The Apostle Paul tells us we have been *bought with a price* by this Jesus who became a baby and was born in Bethlehem (1 Corinthians 6:20). Advent begins to explain how high a price Jesus paid for our purchase.

Celebration, Anticipation, Self-Examination

Advent is a time of *celebration*. God became one of us! Celebrate! Jesus came that we might be reconciled with our heavenly Father. Celebrate! Jesus was born, ultimately, so that he might die on a cross and become accursed for our sins and in our place. Celebrate! This same Jesus was raised from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). Celebrate!

The Advent season is also a time of *anticipation*. The Old Testament prophets, with eager anticipation, foretold the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, their visions and signs were confirmed in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Advent is a time of longing and hope as we prepare our hearts for the Second Coming of our Lord.

As we stand between the ages, between the First and the Second Advent of our Lord, this season should also be a time of *self-examination*. We are called to reflect upon our relationship with the Lord and his mighty and merciful presence in our lives. It is a time to prepare ourselves for his glorious return to judge the quick [living] and the dead.

Hope, Peace, Joy, Love

The Advent season is filled with meaningful symbolism. We will be celebrating each week by the lighting of the Advent wreath. For each of the four weeks of Advent there will be four corresponding candles on the wreath. Three of the candles are purple, the royal color of our

King, and one of the candles is rose-colored, representing joy in anticipation of his coming. This change in color marks a shift from the more solemn tone of the first two Sundays of Advent that focus on preparation and hope, to a more joyous atmosphere of anticipation and expectancy. This Advent season will follow the themes of **hope, peace, joy,** and **love**. In the center of the wreath will be a fifth candle, the Christ candle, which we will light on Christmas Eve to mark the Messiah's arrival. Christ came that we might experience these wonderful benefits of the cross. Yet we wait in eager anticipation for the full realization of the hope, peace, joy, and love that he offers. Therefore, let us not only say *Merry Christmas*, but may we cry *Maranatha, Lord come quickly!*

A Note on This Advent Study

What follows are four studies intended for community group discussion or for personal reflection depending on how each community group will use them. These studies have been developed from notes provided by *The Bible Project*, a great resource that can be accessed online at thebibleproject.com.

As Advent is a time of looking back and looking forward, we will do this in a few different ways. Each study begins with looking at some Old Testament uses of each word from that week's advent theme, in order to begin to form our understanding of what the people of God were waiting for in the Messiah. We will then examine how Jesus fulfills those expectations through his incarnation. This looking back will then cause us to look forward and consider how we wait for the consummation of all these things at Christ's second coming.

The hope is that together, as a church community, we will *come to Bethlehem and see, Christ the Lord, the newborn king*, and, in turn, look forward to when he will *come [again] to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found!*

HOPE

In the Old Testament, there are two main Hebrew words translated as “hope.” The first is *yakhal*, which means simply “to wait for.” Like in the story of Noah and the ark, as the flood waters recede, Noah had to *yakhal* for weeks.

READ – Genesis 8:6-12 –

The word “wait” in this passage is elsewhere translated “hope”. Put yourself in this story, how would you describe Noah’s waiting/hoping? Try to define the nature of this hope.

The other Hebrew word is *qavah*, which also means “to wait.” It’s related to the Hebrew word *qav*, which means “cord.” When you pull a *qav* tight, you produce a state of tension until there’s release. That’s *qavah*: the feeling of tension and expectation while you wait for something to happen.

READ – Psalm 130

In this Psalm in the ESV, *yakhal* is translated hope and *qavah* is translated wait. Describe the state of the person writing this Psalm.

In what or in whom are they hoping? What is the basis for their hope (vv7-8)?

Have you ever had a time in your life where this Psalm would have described your cry? In what or in whom did you place your hope at that time? Why?

In the book of Hosea, the prophet condemns Israel for their idolatry, and after the detailing the judgment they will receive he speaks of their restoration.

READ – Hosea 2:14-15

What is the basis for their hope?

God could turn this “valley of trouble into a door of hope,” like the day when Israel came up from the land of Egypt. God had surprised his people with redemption back in the days of the Exodus, and he could do so again.

As you think about your own life, how does looking back to what God has done in the past give you hope for your future?

The New Testament writers similarly ground our hope for the future in God’s actions in the past. Look up the following passages and try to outline the following:

1. how our present situation is described
2. for what we are hoping
3. the basis of our hope

1 Peter 1:3-7

Col 1:21-27

Rom 5:1-11

Rom 8:18-25

Think about your own life. How would you answer the three questions above? Try to be specific and honest. How does the gospel speak into our hope?

1 Peter 3:15 says we need to be prepared to give an explanation of our hope to those who do not believe. Having done this study, how would you explain your Christian hope in the midst of your current circumstances?

PEACE

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. The most basic meaning of *shalom* is complete or whole. The word can refer to a stone that has a perfect whole shape with no cracks. It can also refer to a completed stone wall that has no gaps and no missing bricks. *Shalom* refers to something that's complex with lots of pieces that's in a state of completeness, wholeness.

It's like Job who says his tents are in a state of *shalom* because he counted his flock and no animals are missing (Job 5:24). It's like when David visited his brothers on the battlefield, he was told to inquire about their *shalom* (1 Sam 17:18). The core idea is that life is complex, full of moving parts and relationships and situations, and when any of these is out of alignment or missing, your *shalom* breaks down. Life is no longer whole; it needs to be restored. The basic meaning of *shalom* when you use it as a verb is to make complete or restore.

Look up the following verses and describe how *shalom* is being used in each context.

1 Kings 9:25 – (*shalom* is translated as “finished”)

Exodus 22:1-9 – (*shalom* is translated as “pay”, “repay” and “restitution”)

Proverbs 16:7 – (*shalom* is translated as “peace”)

With all this in mind, we can turn to the well-known passage in Isaiah that looks forward to the Messiah's coming.

READ Isaiah 9:2-9 –

How does Isaiah describe the peace that this royal son would bring?

It is this rich context and longing for *shalom* that provides the background for the coming of Jesus. The New Testament picks up these themes but uses the greek word *eirene* which is translated as “peace” in our English Bibles.

READ Luke 2:1-14 –

What is the announcement that accompanies Christ's birth?

Read the following passages. How does Jesus fulfill the OT longing for *shalom*? How do the NT authors describe the peace Jesus accomplished?

Romans 5:1, 6-11

Ephesians 2:11-22

Colossians 1:19-22

During the season of Advent we look back to Christ's first coming to give us confidence and hope as we await His second coming. When Jesus came, his life, death and resurrection accomplished peace for us now. In the Gospel of John, "peace" was his favorite greeting after the resurrection (see John 20:19, 21 and 26).

As we look for his second coming, what kind of "peace" are we still waiting for?

And as we wait, how might we experience his peace? (See John 14:27 and 16:33).

The world around us longs for peace. How does your reflection on Christ's first and second coming help you talk about the peace we can experience and for which we hope? How can the two advents of Christ offer good news to your neighbors who long for peace?

Joy

Most languages have lots of words to describe the experience of being in a good mood: words like happy, cheerful, joyful, and so on. The same goes for the languages of the Bible. In ancient biblical Hebrew, there is a variety of words for gladness or joy: like *simchah*, *sason*, or *giyl*. In the Greek New Testament there is *chara*, *euphosune*, or *agalliasis*. Each word has its own unique nuance, but they all basically refer to the feeling of joy and happiness.

Now what makes these biblical “joy” words interesting is noticing the kinds of things that bring happiness and also seeing how “joy” is a key theme that runs through the whole story of the Bible.

In what types of things can we find joy according to these verses?

Psalm 65:11-12

Psalm 104:14-15

Proverbs 23:24-25

Proverbs 27:9

However, human history isn’t just a joy-fest. The biblical story shows how we live in a world that’s been corrupted by our own selfishness. It’s marked by death and loss, and this is where biblical faith offers a unique perspective on joy. It is an attitude God’s people adopt, not because of happy circumstances, but because of their hope in God’s love and promise.

Psalm 105 recounts Israel’s history from Abraham through the Exodus. At the end of the Psalm, the psalmist tells of Moses bringing the people out of Egypt – and they rejoice with singing.

READ Psalm 105:39-43 –

Where are the people when they sing? What are their circumstances? How does this add to our understanding of the nature of Biblical joy?

This “joy in the wilderness” was a defining moment, it was a way of saying that the joy of God’s people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny. This theme reappears later in Israel’s story during the exile.

READ Isaiah 51:10-11 –

How does the prophet connect the Exodus to the people’s return from Exile?

As we get to the New Testament, notice how the birth of Christ is announced by an angel:

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

At his first coming, Christ’s life, death and resurrection gave us great reason to rejoice and be glad. As we await his second coming, we can wait with joy.

Read the following passages, and take note of the theme of “joy in the wilderness.” What do these verses say about the joy we can have in this time between Christ’s first and second coming?

Matthew 5:11-12

Acts 5:40-42

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 15:1-11

In the end, Jesus will come again to judge and finally put things aright. When that happens there will be tremendous joy:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come!” (Revelation 19:6-7)

As we have seen, the joy of God’s people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny. This is very different from the trite advice to “turn that frown upside down.” Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus’ own life, death, resurrection and imminent return.

What about you? How does Christ’s first coming bring you joy? How does the hope of his second coming bring you joy?

In a world full of attempts at generating happiness, in a season that attempts to generate sentimentality and “glad tidings”, how is Christian joy different? How might you explain the difference to a neighbor or friend?

Love

If there is one word that Christians know can be found in the Bible – it is the word love. God is love. We are to love God and love our neighbor. Love is patient. Love is kind. There is a whole book in the Old Testament dedicated to love (Song of Solomon). We know love. Right? Or do we?

All of that is beautiful language, but what exactly do we mean by the word “love”? It’s an unclear word in English because you can love your mom, and you can love pizza. And if the word “love” means the same thing in both of those cases, your mom’s going to feel real bad.

In both Hebrew and Greek, there are many words for love – each with different nuances and shades of meaning. But the most important uses of “love” are demonstrated through action. Love is not primarily a feeling for someone else that happens to you, like our phrase “I fell in love.” No, love is action. It’s a choice that you make to seek the well-being of people other than yourself.

READ Deuteronomy 7:6-9 –

There are actually three different Hebrew words used in these few verses for love. What does “love” mean according to these verses? How specifically is it shown?

The Old Testament prophets often reflect on the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of Israel, using the metaphor of marital love and then infidelity.

READ Isaiah 63:7-9 –

After recounting God’s judgment on Israel for their infidelity, how does the prophet say God’s love was demonstrated in the past?

The season of advent is actually the perfect time to consider what God means by the word “love”, because it is in Christ’s coming that we get the clearest picture of what love is, according to the Bible.

How do the following passages define love according to Christ’s first coming?

John 3:16

Romans 5:6-8

1 John 4:9

So far we have focused on God's love for his people. But as we know, God commands that we love in return. In fact, when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he said all of the Law and the Prophets hang on loving God and loving your neighbor.

In 1 John 4:7-21, John circles around all of these issues of God's love for us, our love for Him and for neighbor, and Christ's first and second coming. It is nonlinear in its arrangement, but is a beautiful rumination on all of these topics.

READ 1 John 4:7-21 –

Try to rearrange John's argument in a way that makes sense to you. How do you put together God's love, our responses of love, and the first and second comings of Christ?

How is what we find in these verses a different picture of love than what we might find in the world? How could this be good news to a world that thinks it understands "love"?

Finally, God's love not only preserves us from judgment at the second coming, but will also remake us.

READ 1 John 3:1-2 –

How do these verses create a longing for the second coming in you? What is your response to this hope?

This advent season we've looked at four interrelated topics of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Suppose a non-christian friend asked you about a bumper sticker they saw, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season." Having done these studies, how might you use the Advent themes to share the good news of Christ? (They might be a skeptic, they might be antagonistic, they might be genuinely curious – you decide – how would you respond?)