



ADVENT GUIDE 2016

Overview

Advent is the season of the Church calendar when God's people posture their hearts & direct their minds toward the first coming of King Jesus. Yet, we do not only look back, but we also look around at our current setting as well as forward to a future reality. As we reflect on the first coming of Jesus we're reminded of the powerful stretch of the gospel in our lives today. Further, we celebrate the first coming of Jesus with hopeful anticipation of his second coming— when he once and for all will restore healing, peace, justice, and joy in the world.

During these next four weeks we will witness an epic battle. The True and Living God will be contested by idols posturing themselves as saviors. The True Story presents a True Savior, while other stories offer only weak substitutes. Worshipping these false and flimsy saviors will lead us down the path of distress instead of joy; greed instead of gratitude; and weariness instead of rest. Lets be honest: how many of us will feel as if we need a vacation once the holidays are over? May that not be the case this year! What if we could intentionally orient our lives over the next few weeks to maximize our joy in the first advent and lean expectantly towards the second?

Imagine a holiday season void of:

- Stress from a packed schedule
- Excessive spending and credit card debt
- Familial wounds and hurt

Better yet, imagine an Advent season filled with:

- True joy and rest in the Gospel of Christ
- Thankfulness for blessings of the Father
- Celebrating with God's new family

We invite you to join us this Advent as we center ourselves on the Kingdom of God. As a family of missionary servants we will practice six weekly rhythms as we turn our hearts toward our Savior. There is flexibility and freedom with these rhythms to do them within your MC, with your spouse and kids, or on your own.

Read: Each week we will commit to the public and private reading of Scripture. The weekly passages will be the text read and preached on Sunday morning. Further, the Scripture we use is taken from the Revised Common Lectionary. That is a big term we'll get into later. But for now, just realize that this means Christians all over the world will be soaking in these same passages as you each week.

Reflect: How is God's Word challenging, encouraging, and sending you? Each week we will ponder on the power and beauty of the King and His Kingdom.

Listen: Music can ignite our passion for Christ in amazing ways. Each week there will be a different song that coincides with the passage. All songs can be found on YouTube.

Pray: Through this season may we be reminded of the repeated calls to pray in the Sermon on the Mount. May we be people who seek, ask, and knock on the door of Our Father in Heaven.

Fast: Each week we will abstain from specific things that compete for our thoughts and affections. Fasting is a biblical practice (Matthew 6:16-18) that helps expose idolatry and reorient our hearts to God.

Celebrate: If we aren't careful we'll allow our culture to define what rejoicing and celebrating look like during the holiday season. Each week we'll be invited to enjoy God's creation in a fun, unique, and worshipful way. May God's people enjoy this season with abundant celebration!

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT: “LONGING FOR THE KINGDOM” NOVEMBER 27-DECEMBER 3

In the Old Testament, God’s people were longing for their Lord to return and establish his Kingdom. They longed for the day when God will dethrone foreign rulers and restore them back to the land he had promised. In the same light, we enter into the story of Israel as we wait for our King to return. We desire to be a people who long for the coming Kingdom within a world constantly seeking instant gratification.

Read: Isaiah 2:1-5; 65:17-25; Matthew 24:36-44

Reflect: The world is not the way it should be. What are the broken parts of the world you desire to see transformed when Jesus returns? Draw two pictures: one of specific brokenness within the world, and one of what will happen to this brokenness when Heaven is fully restored to Earth. Hang the pictures in a place where you’ll see them daily as a reminder that we live within a “now and not yet” Kingdom.

Listen: “My Father’s World” by Gungor

Pray:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Pray that God’s Kingdom would come down to earth. Pray that the cleansing power of heaven would finally wash away the brokenness within our city.

Fast: Social media & news media. In a world filled with conflicting views of progress we will be a community who places our hope fully in the future coming of Jesus.

Celebrate: Take time this week to do something recreational that you enjoy (walking, hiking, biking, golfing, etc). As you are doing, this thank God for the goodness he has instilled within creation for us to enjoy. Imagine what this activity will be like when he fully restores the world!

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT: "PREPARING FOR THE KINGDOM" DECEMBER 4 - 10

A voice cries out from the wilderness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, he calls both the sinner and religious to prepare for the coming King. Today we too prepare ourselves for the coming Kingdom. We turn away from allegiances to false kings in a world filled with idols.

Read: Psalm 72; Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12; 1 Peter 1:13

Reflect: In Psalm 72 King David is petitioning for the Truer and Greater King to come and fully install His Kingdom. David is shepherding Israel to fix their gaze on the Lord. In your journal or piece of paper make a list on the left side of the page of the verses that most stir your affections for God. What excites you? What provides the most hope? On the right side of the page right down the idols in your life that are currently robbing your affections for Christ.

Listen: "All Glory Be To Christ" by Kings Kaleidoscope

Pray: Review your two lists. Praise God for the deliverance he provides from the bondage of false gods. Meditate on grace and power of the King & petition to Him the thoughts you wrote down in the left column.

Fast: Food for one day. During this time we will ask God to reveal unexposed disbelief and idolatry.

Celebrate: Set aside one night this week to cook a meal with family, friends, or neighbors. Have everyone partake in the meal preparation together: grocery shopping, food prep, cooking, setting the table. During the preparation discuss this question: what does it mean to be a community that is preparing for the coming Kingdom?

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT: “SEEING FOR THE KINGDOM” DECEMBER 11 - 17

From prison John the Baptist sends a disciple to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus responds, “Go tell John, ‘The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised, the good news is for the poor.’”

The Kingdom that God’s people have longed and prepared for is now here. The power of Heaven is bursting into their reality through Jesus Christ. They can see, hear, and taste the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is at hand! Today, we see the Kingdom manifested in Jesus. We orient our lives around being foretastes of the Kingdom within a world that’s starving for meaning and truth.

Read: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146; Matthew 11:1-6; Mark 1:15; John 14:12-14

Reflect: Jesus inaugurates his ministry with this proclamation: “The Kingdom of God is here!” Over the next three years he goes on to display the Kingdom: the blind see, the sick are healed, the dead raised, the sinner is forgiven. Jesus is doing up close what God intends to do for the whole creation. Reflect on how you’ve seen glimmers of God’s Kingdom within the world today. Where is goodness? Where is restoration? Where is love? Where is hope?

Listen: “Build Your Kingdom Here” by Rend Collective & “Joy To The World”

Pray: Father, reveal to us the beauty and power of your Kingdom amongst us today. May we see glimmers of heaven from within this dark world.

Fast: Alcohol & sweets, or coffee. We will withhold for that which is delightful to taste. In doing so we will delight in the flavors of the Kingdom around us today.

Celebrate: Break the fast by going out and enjoying self serve frozen yogurt! It must be at a place that provides the small sample cups! As you sample all the amazing flavors be reminded of how God’s people are called to be a foretaste—a small sample— of the Kingdom.

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT: “TRUSTING THE KINGDOM” DECEMBER 18 - 24

The logic of the Kingdom does not make sense:

- Mary’s virgin pregnancy was difficult for Joseph to believe
- Bethlehem—where Jesus was born— had little global significance
- A barn was not a suitable place of birth for a king
- The good news is for the poor
- The King that came to concur would end up crucified

We see time and again the logic of the Kingdom is counterintuitive. It doesn’t align with the reasoning of this world. Today we will trust in God’s ways once and for all. We will be people of faith in a world of skepticism and doubt.

Read: Isaiah 7:1-17; Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 2:1-21

Reflect: What aspects of God are the most difficult to believe in? Why do you think your faith struggles in these areas?

Listen: “No Longer Slaves” by Bethel Music & “O Come All Ye Faithful”

Pray: Jesus, lead us to once and for all trust you and your Kingdom. As we prepare to celebrate and remember your birth would we do so with bowed hearts. Lead us to trust you— the good King who loves us and is for us.

Fast: Consumer spending. We will withhold from all consumer spending this week as we trust that Jesus is the only gift we need.

Celebrate: On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day take a moment to sit down and read the stanzas below from “Our World Belongs To God: A Contemporary Testimony.” Then, go and celebrate the birth of our King!

*As followers of Jesus Christ, living in this world—
which some seek to control, and others view with despair—
we declare with joy and trust:*

Our world belongs to God!

*From the beginning, through all the crises of our times,
until the kingdom fully comes, God keeps covenant forever:*

Our world belongs to God!

*Remembering the promise to reconcile the world to himself,
God joined our humanity in Jesus Christ— the eternal Word made flesh.
He is the long-awaited Messiah, one with us and one with God,
fully human and fully divine, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.*

Our world belongs to God!

*God holds this world with fierce love.
Keeping his promise, he sends Jesus into the world,
pours out the Holy Spirit, and announces the good news:
sinners who repent and believe in Jesus live anew as members of the family of God—
the firstfruits of a new creation.*

Our world belongs to God!

*Being both divine and human, Jesus is the only mediator.
He alone paid the debt of our sin; there is no other Savior.*

Our world belongs to God!

*Our hope for a new creation is not tied to what humans can do,
for we believe that one day every challenge to God's rule will be crushed.
His kingdom will fully come, and the Lord will rule.*

Our world belongs to God!

*We long for that day when our bodies are raised,
the Lord wipes away our tears, and we dwell forever in the presence of God.
We will take our place in the new creation, where there will be no more death or mourning
or crying or pain, and the Lord will be our light.*

Our world belongs to God!