

ADVENT

2021



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ARRIVING AT BETHLEHEM

The Old Testament festival tradition was ordained of God so that his mighty acts of goodness and grace might be never forgotten and ever remembered.

The **Christian year** follows that precedent by dividing the year into a series of seasons that rehearse the major events of God's saving activity in history. **Advent** is the first of those seasons. The word **Advent** comes from the Latin **Adventus** and means **coming** or **arrival**.

The Advent Wreath – often composed of evergreens – is a circle that represents eternity. Lighting candles on the wreath dates from the 16th century and is a custom developed to help make the preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ intimate and personal.

This guide is offered with one goal - to rehearse the history, recognize the reality, and appreciate the wonder of the world's greatest miracle – the Creator's entry into His own creation!



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WEEK ONE

THE GIFT

OF THE LAW

Out of the heartache and tragedy of human rebellion and fall, God called a people to himself.

He delivered this people out of slavery in Egypt - but for a purpose more significant than mere rescue.

He brought them to Sinai and began the process of binding them to himself through the gift of the Law.

The Law functions in many ways for Christians – but first and foremost it is the revelation of the shape and character of the **God who is**, and how human beings are to be related to both that God and each other.

Light the first candle of the Advent Wreath and read Exodus 20:1-17. Celebrate the fact that through the Law God calls his people to himself, reveals his will, and brings that revelation to completion in the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ.

Sing: *O Come, O Come, Immanuel*. | Note particularly stanza three - Lord of might . . . on Sinai's height . . . gave holy law.

WEEK TWO

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PROPHETS

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that the ministry of the prophet is twofold: to lament the past and to envision a new future.

Prophecy, then, gives voice to the judgment of God over the wickedness of the human heart and also evokes a whole new world in which believers are invited to live.

Isaiah sees the darkness in which humanity walks but also the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and Prince of Peace who will bear humanity's suffering and bring the light of life.

Light two candles on the Advent Wreath and read Isaiah 9:2-7 and 53:1-12. Reflect on how we might be part of the opening of a new future that is the promise of God and the ministry of Christ.

Sing: *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*. | Note particularly the lyric Israel's strength and consolation.

WEEK THREE

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

The Gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke all introduce John the Baptist as the fulfillment of a combination of prophecies taken from Isaiah, Malachi and Exodus of one who would "prepare the way" for the coming Lord.

The fourth gospel describes John as "a man sent from God" who came to bear witness to the light, "so that through him everyone might believe." – John 1:6 and 7

John embodies the prophetic imagination on which we meditated last week. He proclaims a baptism of repentance for sins, but also announces the coming of one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Light three candles on the Advent Wreath and read Matthew 3:1-18. Reflect on how we, in our time, might be fearless and faithful witnesses to the coming King.

Sing: *Go Tell it on the Mountain* | Reflect on the privilege and responsibility of being witnesses to the truth and importance of Christ.

WEEK FOUR

THE WONDER OF THE SHEPHERDS

Without warning, the announcement of the greatest event in the history of the world comes to working men, tending sheep on a Palestinian hillside.

Seemingly out of nowhere, angels bring a message that explodes in the canopy of a blue sky. "Unto you is born this day," they proclaim, "in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" – Luke 2:11

Suddenly, the world is changed forever. From this moment on, all of time will be measured by its relationship to the birth of Christ.

Light four candles on the Advent Wreath and read Luke 2:8-16. Reflect on the good news that Jesus was born a babe to make a way to heaven for all who believe.

Sing: *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing* | Take time to wonder at the glory of creation's King!

CHRISTMAS DAY

THE LIFE OF THE ETERNAL SON

Christmas is born in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Born a babe in Bethlehem, the life Jesus lived – and gave – alone makes it possible that humanity might know peace with God.

The Eternal Son was born into the created world so that heaven might be known on earth. He came to save humanity not only from the penalty of sin by his death but from the power of sin by his life.

Light four candles on the Advent wreath – and now, a fifth - the “Christ candle” in the center. Read John 12:45-46. Reflect on Jesus’ own words when, as a grown man, he looked back to tell us the meaning of his birth - that he came to shine as light in a dark world.

Sing: *Joy to the World, the Lord is Come!* | Give thanks to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit for the miracle of grace and the gift of love that comes to the world uniquely, supremely, and decisively in the birth of Jesus Christ!

Special thanks to Dr. John Shouse, senior professor of Christian theology, for writing this year's Advent devotions.

Visit Gateway's new publishing site: **thegateway.press** - launching January 2022 - for more content from faculty members like Dr. Shouse and the broader Gateway family.

For more Advent resources for your church or small group visit **gs.edu/advent**.



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