



2014

Advent

Devotional

Introduction

Ad-vent /'ad, vent/
noun the arrival of a notable
person, thing, or event

Theologians often speak of the first advent of Christ in terms of humiliation which encompasses his humble birth through to his body rending death on the cross. This king, creator, and same in substance, glory, and power as God the Father came to put on lowly human flesh and be subjected to all of the miseries that accompany the human condition yet enduring them all in perfection. The beginning of the story in a lowly manger to a young virgin mother and nervous and unsure earthly father in the little town of Bethlehem seems hardly befitting of the King of Glory. And, yet, he would have it no other way in order to bring about the purpose for which he was sent: the redemption and reconciliation of the sons and daughters of the Most High God. It was this great joy that was set

before him that buffeted him and served to empower him to endure the great shame of the cross on which he would bear the weight of the total sins of the elect past, present, and future and the fullness of the associated cup of the wrath of God drained to the dregs. Out of the brokenness of his crucified body and shed blood he rose in glorious exaltation having broken the bonds of sin and death for the children of God. Christ was further exalted in ascending to the right hand of his and our Father where he sits in full satisfaction of his redemption accomplished and applied. In between the now and the not yet, he makes intercession for the sons and daughters of God and awaits the call to the final glorious advent. This last advent will witness the making of all things new and free from defect and spoil along with the grand glorification of God's children at which Creation will at last release its held breath in redemptive relief.

The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2

It is the fullness of this story past, present, and future that we celebrate each Advent. This devotional contains a look back to the Shadows of the Advents beginning in Genesis where echoes of the fullness of the grace of God begin before growing brighter in the prophecy in Isaiah to reflect the faithfulness of God. We then move to bear witness to the First Advent bursting gloriously forth in the Gospel of Luke and its redemptive light piercing the darkness in the Gospel of John. The journey will end each week looking forward to the Last Advent which winks like a distant but bright star in the book of Revelation. The hope is that each of us will have a fuller appreciation for the redemptive work of Christ as the God who was, is, and will eternally be Immanuel, God with us!

This devotional is set up to carry you through the Scriptures that will be used in the Advent liturgy each Sunday. You can prepare ahead of time and enrich your worship experience or use it after as a time of reflection. Each week begins with Shadows of the Advent then moves to the First Advent and ends with the Final Advent which you are free to move through at your own pace. The commentary and questions are meant to stimulate thinking and conversation among your family and friends.

Week 1: Unto Us a Child is Born

Shadows of the Advents:

The echoes of the Advents of Christ gloriously begins in the midst of the wreckage of the Fall. How gracious is our God that He would promise redemption and reconciliation to rise from the ashes of the thorough cosmic failure of Adam and Eve! The woman is assured that a child would come from her lineage that would remain unstained by the sin that now courses through the veins of every living thing. It is this perfect child that will suffer the bruising of his heel, a foreshadow of the cross to come in the First Advent, however, it is he who will deliver the fatal blow to all that is at enmity with God and purchase back the ground that separates the sons and daughters from their loving Abba Father to be brought to full fruition at the Last Advent.

*14*The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. *15* I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Genesis 3:14-15

The promise of this child grows brighter still in the prophecy of Isaiah 9. The darkness that has hung so thick that it could be felt soul deep will be pierced by the promised infant's first cry signaling an end to slavery, war, and the oppressive rule by capricious kings who can never be satisfied. For unto us is born a child given for the total flourishing of His children in the midst of a Creation made brand new over which he will reign in righteousness and justice to the joy of His people for an eternity!

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. *2* The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. *3* You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. *4* For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. *5* For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. *6* 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. *7* 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 9:1-7

Advent Reflection:

1. Have you experienced the grace of God in the midst of the wreckage of your sin and failure as was displayed in Genesis 3:14-15? Do you offer this grace to others who have sinned against and failed you?
2. Has the Christ child brought you greater freedom, peace, and flourishing? What does this look like for you?

Week 1: Unto Us a Child is Born

The First Advent:

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, **33** and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." **34** And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" **35** And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. **36** And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God." **38** And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:26-38

In the meager confines of the humble city of Nazareth in Galilee, the Holy Spirit seeks Mary whose blood lineage winds its way all the way back to Eve, the woman of the promise. She is the chosen one who will supernaturally conceive and give birth to the promised child, the holy Son of God. His name is to be Jesus, meaning "Yahweh (or God) saves," and he will be a king on the throne of David forever as foretold in Isaiah 9. The fullness of time was preparing to burst forth in the promised child of Genesis 3:14-15.

This promised child was to bring the light that would pierce the uttermost darkness in the First Advent. Those who receive this light and walk in it will become sons and daughters of the Most High God who will walk in freedom and flourish in peace in union with Christ their King. Those who do not will continue to languish bound in darkness at war with both the light and those who walk in the light.

9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. **12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:9-13

Advent Reflection:

1. How does the supernatural nature of Christ's conception affect your belief in and reception of him as the promised child who would bring about extraordinary freedom, peace, and joy in the lives of God's children? Does history show that a person born under natural circumstances can bring these things about for eternity?
2. Take time to give thanks for the light of the Christ child that has pierced the darkness of slavery, war, and oppressive rule to bring freedom, flourishing in peace, and its preservation in the reign of the righteous and just Child King. Try to remember specific examples in your life and in the lives of those around you.

Week 1: Unto Us a Child is Born

The Last Advent:

Revelation 12 grants us a unique Advent insight behind the heavenly veil to see the spiritual impact of the coming of the Christ child promised in Genesis 3:14-15 and Isaiah 9 which was fulfilled in the early chapters of Luke. The light that pierced the darkness in John 1 sparked the war in earnest with all of the powers and principalities of rebellion against God. While the dragon raged with great fury, he was defeated in both heaven and earth.

The greatest defeat of all coming with salvation in the Christ child rising from the ashes of what appeared to be the most magnificent loss of all: the crucifixion of the Lamb. This magnificent loss would serve to be our greatest gain. Jesus the Christ was liberated from the wages of sin in his perfect obedience as he rose from death being declared not guilty. This moment of resurrection rendered a thundering indictment on sin and death for all of God's children.

The Lord our God received his perfected and finished work before the throne and granted to Jesus the seat at His mighty right hand where he awaits the call to return in the Last Advent. It is from this seat that Christ reigns even now and makes intercession for the saints who are being plagued by the death throes of the defeated dragon who rages between the now and the not yet. Our call is to look to where Christ is seated and not to the things of the earth between the Advents.

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. 7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Revelation 12:1-11

Advent Reflection:

1. Where do you first look when assailed by the death throes of the defeated dragon? Do you find any comfort in the present reign and hope in the eventual return of Christ?
2. What are you teaching your family and neighbors about life between the Advents based on where you fix your gaze in the midst of trials in a fallen world?

Week 2: The Root of Jesse

Shadows of the Advents:

8 “Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. **9** Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? **10** The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. **11** Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. **12** His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

Genesis 49:8-12

The promised righteous and just king who will reign over and protect God’s kingdom eternally from Isaiah 9 is promised even earlier in God’s Word. We find in Jacob’s blessing of his son Judah in Genesis 49:8-12 the foreshadowing of the Lion of Judah before whom every knee will one day bow and of which his kingship will never end. It is clear from the lineage of Jesus in Luke 3:33-34 that Judah is not the eternal king given his resting place among the other ancestors and kings. This also means that there will be no earthly king who can fulfill such a high calling over the kingdom of God. Thus, we look forward to the Advent of the true Lion of Judah.

Isaiah 11 grants us further insight into the rule and reign of this king, the Lion of Judah who will rise from the stump of Jesse in the lineage of King David and under the eternal promise of the Davidic Covenant from 2 Samuel 7. Yet again, the sovereign protection and preservation of our God Most High bursts forth in His promise to ensure the eternal reign and rule of a King who is filled with the Spirit judging in righteousness and bringing peace, redemption, and reconciliation to all of God’s creation.

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **2** And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. **3** And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, **4** but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. **5** Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. **6** The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. **7** The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. **8** The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. **9** They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. **10** In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. **11** In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

Isaiah 11:1-10

Advent Reflection:

1. What rules and reigns over you this Advent season? What does your life evidence in this regard in terms of where your time, talents, and money are applied?

Week 2: The Root of Jesse

The First Advent:

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Luke 1:67-79

In Luke 1:67-79, Zechariah is overwhelmed with praise as he sees in this baby born in the little town of a Bethlehem the promised Davidic king and coming deliverance from not just earth-bound enemies but also salvation from the overwhelming darkness of sin and death. This horn of salvation is evidence of God being present with His people for the purpose of their redemption. Now the children of God may serve and worship Him in the freedom and peace of their blood-bought righteousness and holiness in Christ alone.

John also testifies of Jesus being the One on whom the prophesied Spirit of Isaiah 11 rests. This Jesus is declared to be the one true of Son of God who will fulfill all that is promised of the shoot from the stump of Jesse. This same Spirit will be given to the sons and daughters of God. Salvation has truly come in the light of the First Advent!

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

John 1:29-34

Advent Reflection:

1. What sparks praise and worship within you this Advent season? How does this affect how you live during this unique time of year?

Week 2: The Root of Jesse

The Last Advent:

We are granted another glimpse behind the veil to witness this powerful scene from before the throne of God. John sees that there is a scroll that contains truths that the people of God desperately need between the now and the not yet. He is overcome with grief by the inability of any earthly king or ruler to reveal and deliver the promised words of life in the midst of the suffering of God's children.

John's grief is short lived as an elder declares that there is one who can supply these words of comfort. It is the promised Lion of the tribe of Judah from Genesis 49, the prophesied root of David, son of Jesse, from Isaiah 11. Though he is the slain Lamb of God who is given to take away the sins of the world, he is also the victorious King before whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess a new song!

We anxiously await the last Advent of this Lion of Judah and root of Jesse in which the final walls of separation will fall allowing the glorious tapestry of God's people to worship and reign in unfettered joy in the new heavens and new earth.

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, 4 and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

Revelation 5:1-10

Advent Reflection:

1. What grieves you most as you look at the world and its fallen condition? How does this affect your hope for future generations?
2. How should the hope of the last Advent affect how we live now as a kingdom of priests?

Week 3: Christ the Covenant

Shadows of the Advents:

God chooses to relate to His people in terms of covenant, a term that is pregnant with a significant amount of meaning far beyond that of a mere contract or will. In God's hands, it is highly relational providing a means by which His children can approach, get to know, and enjoy Him. It is always grounded and clearly displayed in the revelation of His word so as to be fully understood. A covenant with God also includes obligations and responsibilities which are accomplished through obedience to His revealed word as a display of relational love for our Heavenly Father. We see all of this displayed in the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 17:1-8. God declares His desire to be in a relationship with Abram and his offspring forever as revealed here and throughout Scripture. This eternal promised covenant will serve as a Balm of Gilead for the children of God through their various travels and trials, exoduses and exiles, and buildings and destructions.

Isaiah 49 prophesies of the coming Christ as a covenant to the people. Thus, he will be the means by which God's people will be restored to Him, and He will be gloriously revealed to His children. He will also be the means of obedience through which the children can love the Lord their God with all of their hearts, souls, and minds as well as love their neighbors as themselves. Jesus will be the covenant of comfort and compassion worthy of our singing for joy!

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

Genesis 17:1-8

8 Thus says the LORD: "In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, 9 saying to the prisoners, 'Come out,' to those who are in darkness, 'Appear.' They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; 10 they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. 11 And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. 12 Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene." 13 Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.

Isaiah 49:8-13

Advent Reflection:

1. What is the basis of your relationship with God? Does it bring you joy and comfort during this Advent season?

Week 3: Christ the Covenant

The First Advent:

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, **47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, **48** for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; **49** for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. **50** And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. **51** He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; **52** he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; **53** he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. **54** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, **55** as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Luke 1:46-55

Mary recognizes that Christ is the promised covenant from Isaiah 49 and the means of fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant from Genesis 17. She sings of the upside down nature of the kingdom of God in which the proud are scattered, the mighty brought down, and the rich who trusted in their riches are sent away empty while the fearfully dependent on the mercy of God are brought near, the lowly and humble exalted to reign on vacated thrones, and the hungry filled with the unlimited good things of God. This covenant of grace becomes reality with the birth of Christ.

John recognizes this covenantal light bursting forth in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is Christ who is the means of eternal salvation and restoration to God the Father. It is Christ who is the covenant between God and His sons and daughters revealing God's love for His children and the ways in which His children are to express their love for Him!

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. **20** For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **21** But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

John 3:16-21

Advent Reflection:

1. Does the upside down nature of the kingdom of God bring you comfort or concern you?
2. Take time to reflect on God's love for you and those around you as displayed in Christ who serves as the covenant of grace.

Week 3: Christ the Covenant

The Last Advent:

The Holy Spirit offers John and us a glimpse into the glorious future that will be ushered in with the last Advent of Christ. Notice how the language of the new heavens and new earth resonates with Isaiah 49 bringing the covenant in Christ to stunning completion. All that has separated us from the full glory of God's presence will be taken away. All that has blunted our senses to fully enjoying God's love for us will be stripped away. It will be as if we are seeing everything for the very first time. All that is will shimmer with newness and reflect the glory of God!

This is not a vision that predicated on the obedience of fallen men and women, but it is a fixed covenantal reality as declared to Abraham, as promised to Isaiah, as sung by Mary, and as given by the love of God in Christ unto eternal life for those who long for and walk in the light. Painfully, there will be those who long for and demand a different covenant based on their love of the darkness. As we long for the Last Advent, let us also long for more and more to come to God through Christ the redeeming covenant of grace.

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. 7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Revelation 21:1-8

Advent Reflection:

1. Take time to think about those who you know who are not defined by Christ as the covenant of grace of God and the hope of this new heavens and earth. How might you share this Gospel with them in love this Advent season?

Week 4: Good News to the Poor

Shadows of the Advents:

19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. **22** So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s house. Joseph lived 110 years. **23** And Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph’s own. **24** And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

Genesis 50:19-24

Joseph’s promise to his brothers that it would be God who visits them to deliver them to the Promised Land was not merely a historical reference to a fixed point in time. It would serve as the echo of a pattern of good news for the people of God over the generations. Again and again, God’s children would find themselves in strange and foreign lands in need of deliverance. Again and again, it was God who would visit them to deliver them.

Isaiah declares that the servant of the Lord will visit God’s people to declare the good news to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, the bound, the mourning, and the broken down whom He will visit and personally deliver into a greater Promised Land. This will result in great rejoicing!

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; **2** to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; **3** to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. **4** They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. **5** Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; **6** but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. **7** Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy. **8** For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. **9** Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed. **10** I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. **11** For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:1-11

Advent Reflection:

1. Where did you first hear this good news of God who would personally visit you in Christ to deliver you to a greater Promised Land? What impact is this Gospel having on you this year?

Week 4: Good News to the Poor

The First Advent:

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" **15** When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. **21** And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2:1-21

These humble shepherds were keeping vigilant watch in the fields of their flocks covered by the purest darkness that Creation could provide. However, what they were watching for is not what would startle them to full fear and attention. It was the sky exploding into symphonic glory as the angel of the Lord and the heavenly hosts proclaim the coming of the good news and great joy in the birth of the Savior wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. As the sky recedes back into darkness, the shepherds make haste to see this Advent child resulting in their unabashed worship of the living God who has visited His people for their salvation.

John too sees this Christ child as the means of God's visitation and deliverance of His people. Jesus is the Word that became flesh and revealed the glory of God known to all mankind to offer grace upon grace. It is this deliverance of grace and truth that we celebrate this Advent season.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **15** (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") **16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

John 1:14-18

Advent Reflection:

1. How has Christ displayed God's glory in grace and truth to you? (Remember, you were not saved from God; you were saved to God)

Week 4: Good News to the Poor

The Last Advent:

John's Revelation ends with this aching desire for Jesus to come soon. There is the sense of weariness at life between the Advents that causes many of us to join in the chorus of "Come, Lord Jesus!" along with John and the suffering saints over the ages. There is also the warning that the words concerning the Last Advent as declared in Revelation are not to be altered or changed in any way given their gravity and ability to give good news to the poor in Spirit between the now and the not yet. Just as all of the other promises and covenants have surely been fulfilled in Christ, so too will this come to pass in him. Praise God that we are one Advent season closer to Christ's return!

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. 18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Revelation 22:17-21

Advent Reflection:

1. What has the Lord revealed to you that is good news this Advent season?
2. Take time to give thanks for all that God provided for you and your family and for all of the creative ways in which He has displayed His love to you.