

Week 3: The First Advent in Action

Overview: This lesson examines how Jesus Christ's earthly ministry served as the active fulfillment of the first advent, bridging the gap between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament reality through His roles and teachings.

Objectives:

- To understand Jesus's earthly life and ministry as the fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies, moving from expectation to reality.
- To recognize Jesus's divine identity and mission through His actions, teachings, and miracles.
- To apply the hope and promise of the first Advent to personal faith and preparation for Christ's second coming.

Theme: The transition from the fulfillment of the prophetic promise (the "coming") to the manifestation of the tangible reality of Jesus as the promised Messiah and light of the world who brings hope, salvation, and divine presence. Jesus comes with the call to repent, believe, and make one's life ready in preparation for the coming King.

Key Scriptures

- **Isaiah 9:6-7:** Prophecy of the Messiah's titles (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace).
- **Matthew 3, John 1 (John the Baptist):** The forerunner preparing the way.
- **(John 10:25, 30; Luke 4 (Jesus's Claims/Works):** "The works I do bear witness about me," proving His divine origin.
- **Luke 2:10-11:** The angel's announcement of the Savior's birth (Joy).
- **Philippians 4:4 (Grace):** Rejoicing in the Lord.

Study Points (What to look for)

- **Jesus's Identity:** Evidence for His divinity through His words (I AM statements, claims of unity with the Father) and supernatural acts (miracles).
 - **Roles Fulfilled:** Jesus as Prophet, Priest, King, and Deliverer.
 - **The Message of the Advent:** Hope for the coming Messiah, the reality of sin, the need for forgiveness, and the promise of His return.
 - **Personal Application:** How does recognizing this fulfillment impact one's own spiritual life, repentance, and anticipation of the future?
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Study Points & Discussion Questions

Point 1: The Incarnation: The Word Became Flesh (John 1:14)

The first advent is grounded in the miracle of the incarnation—the moment God entered human history. By becoming flesh and "dwelling among us," Jesus moved beyond being a distant concept to a tangible Savior. This physical presence was necessary for Him to experience human struggles and serve as a sympathetic high priest.

- **A Personal God:** The incarnation asserts that God is not an abstract force but a relational being who desires intimacy with humanity.
- **A Tangible Savior:** By taking on flesh, God is seen, touched, and heard. As the Apostle John describes in his first epistle, the disciples "heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and our hands handled, concerning the word of life" (1 John 1:1-3, ESV), emphasizing the physical reality of Jesus.
- **A Shared Experience:** Jesus' physical life on earth involved experiencing the full spectrum of human emotions and struggles—joy, hunger, fatigue, temptation, and sorrow. This shared experience enables Him to be a "sympathetic high priest" who truly understands human frailty (Hebrews 4:15, ESV).
- **John 1:14:** This verse highlights several key aspects:
 - **"The Word became flesh":** The divine Word (*Logos*) assumed a human nature.
 - **"Dwelt among us":** The Greek word for "dwelt" (ἐσκήνωσεν, *eskēnōsen*) evokes imagery of the Old Testament tabernacle, where God's presence resided among His people. Jesus is the new, living tabernacle.
 - **"We have seen his glory":** In His physical life, people witnessed divine attributes like grace and truth in a human form.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the reality of God becoming "flesh" change the way you perceive His accessibility? The incarnation breaks down perceived barriers between the divine and the human. It suggests that God is approachable and personally invested in human life.
- In what ways does Jesus' physical life on earth make His later sacrifice more meaningful to you? By living a human life, Jesus demonstrated that His sacrifice was not a detached, theoretical act. He experienced pain, betrayal, and death—the real consequences of the human condition—making His willingness to suffer for humanity all the more poignant and impactful.

Point 2: The Call to Reorientation: Repentance and the Kingdom (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15)

Jesus began His ministry with a clear message: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel". This was not just a call to stop sinning but a summons to completely reorient one's life toward the reality of God's present reign. His first advent signaled that the long-awaited promises were arriving in Him.

- **Core Message: The Fulfilled Time & Present Kingdom (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15)**
 - **Meaning:** The "time" (prophesied age) is fulfilled; God's rule (Kingdom) isn't just future but *present* through Jesus.
 - **Significance:** Jesus' arrival fulfills ancient promises, bringing God's reign into the world now.
- **Repentance: A Complete Turn (Metanoia): (Matt 4:17, Mark 1:15, Acts 26:20, Romans 2:4)**
 - **Not Just Feeling Bad:** In the original Greek, the word for repent is *metanoia*. It is often misunderstood as merely feeling guilty or "saying sorry." More than remorse; it's a fundamental *change of mind* leading to a new direction.
 - **Turning From/To:** Turning away from idols/sin and turning *towards* God, His purpose, and His ways. A change of mind or a total reversal of direction.
Repentance is the act of turning *away* from a self-centered reality and turning *toward* God's reality. It is a "metabolic" change (i.e., it is essential for "new" life) in how one thinks, perceives, and acts. It is the necessary response to the fact that a new King has arrived.
 - **Action-Oriented:** Must produce "fruit in keeping with repentance"—visible change and good works, not just pretense; a reorientation.
- **Believing the Gospel: Call to Trust & Transformation (Pisteuo):**

Jesus couples repentance with belief. To "believe in the gospel" is not intellectual assent to facts; it is allegiance. It is placing one's full weight and trust in the Good News that God is reclaiming the world through Jesus. **Mark 9:23, John 3:16, Romans 10:9, Acts 16:3**

 - **The Good News (Gospel):** The Kingdom is here, and Jesus offers life within it.
 - **Trust:** Believing Jesus is enough and accepting His empowering Spirit for the journey.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is repentance the first step in experiencing the "good news" of the Kingdom?
 - ❖ **The Conflict of Realms:** You cannot enter a new kingdom while remaining loyal to the old one. Repentance acts as the "exit" from the kingdom of self/darkness and the "entrance" into the Kingdom of God.
 - ❖ **Capacity for Grace:** Until we acknowledge that our current orientation is leading us away from life (sin), we cannot appreciate the "good news" of rescue. Repentance clears the "clutter" of our own agendas so we can receive the King's agenda.
- How does the phrase "the kingdom of God is at hand" impact your daily priorities today?
 - ❖ **Urgency vs. Anxiety:** If the Kingdom is "at hand" (presently available), our daily tasks are no longer just chores; they are opportunities to manifest God's will "on earth as it is in heaven."
 - ❖ **Shift in Values:** When a new government takes over, the currency changes. In the Kingdom of God, the "currency" is love, humility, and service. This realization reorders our priorities from seeking personal status to seeking the flourishing of others.
 - ❖ **Living in the "Now":** It reminds us that we don't have to wait for death to experience God's reign. We can live under His peace, justice, and authority right now in 2025.

Point 3: The New Ethic: The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed the "greater righteousness" required for those in relationship with God. Rather than abolishing the Law, He fulfilled its spiritual intent by moving focus from external rituals to internal heart transformation. He lived as the supreme Prophet, perfectly revealing the Father's will and the true meaning of the Law.

Matthew 5:20: The Pharisees focused on **External Conformity**—performing the right actions to be seen by men. Jesus demanded **Internal Integrity**—aligning the secret desires and motives of the heart with God's character.

Key Teachings & The "Greater Righteousness"

- **The Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12):** Defines the character of Kingdom citizens: humble, mourning, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness. He targeted the root of sin rather than just the sin.
- **Salt & Light (Matt 5:13-16):** Believers' influence on the world, calling them to good works that glorify God.
- **Fulfillment of the Law (Matt 5:17-20):** Jesus didn't abolish the Law but fulfilled its true intent, demanding a righteousness surpassing the Pharisees' strict rule-following by focusing on the heart.
- **The "Six Antithesis-You have heard it said... but I say to you...": Internalizing the Law (Matt 5:21-48)**
 - **Murder & Anger (vv. 21-26):** Anger/insult is the root of murder; reconcile before worship.
 - **Adultery & Divorce (vv. 27-32):** Lustful thoughts are spiritual adultery; address the source.
 - **Revenge vs. Love (vv. 38-48):** Non-retaliation; turn the other cheek. Love, bless, and pray for persecutors to be like God.
- **Sincere Piety (Matt 6:1-18):** Give, pray (Lord's Prayer), and fast secretly, not for human praise, but for God.
- **Kingdom Priorities (Matt 6:19-34):** Store up heavenly treasures, seek God's Kingdom first, trust God for provision.
- **Judging & The Golden Rule (Matt 7:1-12):** Don't judge hypocritically; do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Golden Rule).
- **Two Ways/Foundations (Matt 7:13-27):** The narrow gate vs. the broad; wise builder (hears and does) vs. foolish (hears only).

Discussion Questions:

- Which teaching from the Sermon on the Mount feels most challenging to live out in 2025?
Love your enemies & pray for persecutors: Matt 5:44 is profoundly difficult in today's polarized world, demanding a supernatural response beyond human instinct, challenging the urge for retaliation or tribalism.
- How did Jesus' emphasis on the "heart" (e.g., Matthew 5:21-28) fulfill the deeper purpose of the Old Testament Law?
Heart vs. Law: Jesus fulfills the Law by revealing its intent: not just "don't murder," but "don't let anger/hate fester in your heart".

The Law prohibits the act; Jesus addresses the root cause (anger, lust), showing true righteousness comes from a heart transformed to love God and neighbor, making external obedience insufficient without internal purity.

Point 4: The Bridegroom and the New Covenant (Matthew 9:14–15)

Jesus described Himself as the "bridegroom," signifying a new era of intimacy between God and His people. His ministry transitioned the faithful from an era of mourning and shadows into a time of joy and fulfillment. As the High Priest, He would eventually seal this New Covenant not with animal blood, but with His own life, offering a permanent solution for sin.

The Bridegroom and the New Era: By calling Himself the Bridegroom, Jesus asserts several key theological points.

- **A Claim of Deity:** He identifies with the Old Testament image of Yahweh as the husband of His people (Isaiah 62:5, Hosea 2:19), asserting His divine status and the arrival of the Messianic age. He is fulfilling the role of God, bringing His people into a committed, intimate relationship.
- **Joy vs. Mourning (Matt 9:16-17):** Traditional Jewish fasting was often an expression of mourning or longing for the Messiah. Jesus explains that since the "Bridegroom" is physically present, His disciples must feast in celebration rather than fast in sorrow. The presence of the bridegroom signifies a wedding feast—a time of unparalleled joy and celebration, not mourning or fasting
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:** He marks the arrival of the messianic age, the fulfillment of God's promises of restoration and joy. Jesus acknowledges that "the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away," foreshadowing His sacrificial death on the cross. This act would seal the New Covenant, replacing animal sacrifices with His own blood to offer permanent reconciliation.

Discussion Questions:

- How does the image of Jesus as a "bridegroom" shift your understanding of your relationship with Him?
 - ❖ **Intimacy Over Ritual:** Instead of a distant Lawgiver, Jesus is a loving partner who seeks deep personal connection.
 - ❖ **Sacrificial Love:** Just as a groom commits to his bride, Jesus demonstrates His commitment through the ultimate sacrifice of His life to "adorn" and purify His people.
 - ❖ **Purposeful Longing:** For believers today, the metaphor transforms spiritual disciplines like fasting from legalistic duties into expressions of "homesickness" or longing for the Bridegroom’s return.
- What are the key differences between living under the "old" covenant and the "new" covenant of grace?

Feature	Old Covenant	New Covenant (Grace)
Foundation	Mosaic Law and works	Christ’s sacrificial death and faith
Access to God	Mediated through priests and animal sacrifices	Direct, intimate access to God through the Spirit
Internalization	Laws written on stone	Laws written on the heart by the Holy Spirit
Forgiveness	Temporary removal of sins; "remembrance" of sin	Permanent once-for-all atonement; God "remembers sins no more"
Spiritual Tone	Focused on performance, "shadows," and mourning	Characterized by "new wine," joy, and internal transformation

Point 5: Impact and Identity: Prophet, Priest, and King

Jesus' miracles were "breadcrumbs" leading people to recognize His identity. Jesus' miracles, teachings, and actions were not merely random acts of power or kindness; they were intentional "breadcrumbs" leading people to recognize the fullness of His identity. The Old Testament foreshadowed the coming Messiah in three crucial roles: Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus fulfilled all three perfectly, demonstrating His authority and unique position as God incarnate, the ultimate mediator between God and humanity.

1. Jesus as Prophet - Representing God to Man (Voice of Truth): A prophet's primary role was to deliver God's truth, revelation, and direction to His people. They spoke on behalf of God, calling people to repentance and obedience.

- **Jesus fulfilled this role by:**

- **Speaking with Divine Authority:** Unlike the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus taught as one who had authority, not merely quoting others.
- **Bringing God's Ultimate Revelation:** He is the Word of God made flesh.

- **Key Scriptures:**

- **Deuteronomy 18:18-19:** Moses prophesied that God would send a future prophet like himself, whom the people must obey.
- **John 1:1, 14:** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."
- **Hebrews 1:1-2:** "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..."

2. Jesus as Priest - Representing Man to God (The Bridge to God): The Old Testament priesthood mediated between sinful man and a holy God through sacrifices and intercession. However, their work was temporary and had to be repeated continually.

- **Jesus fulfilled this role by:**

- **Becoming the Ultimate Mediator:** He is the *only* bridge between God and man.
- **Offering the Perfect Sacrifice:** He offered Himself, once for all, as the spotless lamb.
- **Engaging in Continuous Intercession:** He is currently at the right hand of God, praying for us.

- **Key Scriptures:**

- **Hebrews 4:14-16:** We have a great high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses and through whom we can confidently approach God's throne of grace. [1]
- **1 Timothy 2:5:** "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus..."
- **Hebrews 9:24, 28:** Christ entered heaven itself to appear in God's presence for us, putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself once for all.
- **Romans 8:34:** "...It is Christ Jesus who died, rather than was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

3. Jesus as King: Establishing a Spiritual Kingdom (Jesus as King):

Kings ruled, established justice, and provided protection. The people of Israel longed for a political king to restore their earthly power, but Jesus' kingdom is fundamentally different.

- **Jesus fulfilled this role by:**

- **Establishing a Spiritual Kingdom:** His reign is in the hearts and lives of His followers, based on justice, mercy, and service, not political domination.
- **Exercising Ultimate Authority:** All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.

- **Key Scriptures:**

- **Matthew 28:18:** "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

- **John 18:36:** Jesus answered Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting..."
- **Revelation 19:16:** He is the "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Discussion Questions:

- How do you see Jesus exercising His authority as King in your life right now?
Consider: Is He bringing order to a chaotic situation? Is He asking you to "surrender" a specific habit or worry to His leadership? How does His definition of "success" (service and humility) challenge your current goals?
- How does knowing Jesus is currently interceding for you as Priest provide comfort in your struggles?
Consider: Romans 8:34 says Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us. Does it change your perspective on prayer to know Jesus is actively speaking to the Father on your behalf? How does His empathy for your pain make it easier to approach Him?

Closing Reflection

The first advent was not merely a birth; it was the "Advent in Action." Jesus lived a perfect life under the Law to fulfill its requirements on our behalf. He brought the Light into the darkness of exile, proving that God had not forgotten His people. Because He fulfilled the Law and inaugurated the New Covenant, we no longer approach God through fear or ritual, but through the grace and truth found in Christ alone.

Takeaway Challenge

Identify one area of your life where you have been trying to "obey the law" through your own strength or external rituals. This week, consciously "repent"—reorient your mind—by surrendering that area to Jesus' authority as your King and relying on His grace as your High Priest. Read Hebrews 4:14-16 daily to remind yourself of His empathetic mediation.