



WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent is a season of the church calendar that invites us into four weeks of deep reflection on the advent, or arrival, of God in Jesus of Nazareth. It's also a season of awaiting Jesus' promised return. Through focused Scripture reading and intentional spiritual practices, Advent prepares room in our hearts for Jesus' arrival to us even now by His Spirit.

WEEK 1: Waiting & Hope

Scripture

"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope."
— Psalm 130:5

Reflection

Advent is a season of waiting. But not waiting in the way the world waits. Not anxiously. Not apathetically. Not worriedly. Not idly.

During the season of Advent, we are trained to wait well.

Advent trains us to wait with all of ourselves. The psalmist writes, "my whole being waits" for the Lord. It's a waiting that engages your mind, your heart, your imagination, and your body. Advent waiting doesn't bury longing but calls it to the surface. It doesn't deny the ache of unmet desire but leans in.

Advent trains us to wait actively, preparing our hearts so we are ready for when Jesus returns. Advent trains us to wait with a living hope that is anchored in Jesus' resurrection (1 Peter 1:3).

Even as we long for our bodies to heal, our relationships to mend, our anxiety to dissipate, our career to get back on track, our marriage to come back to life, our child to come home, we do so knowing that Jesus is *with us* in the waiting.

Quote

"A waiting person is a patient person. The word 'patience' means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us.

Impatient people are always expecting the real thing to happen somewhere else and therefore want to go elsewhere. The moment is empty. But patient people dare to stay where they are. Patient living means to live actively in the present and wait there. Waiting, then, is not passive. It involves nurturing the moment, as a mother nurtures the child that is growing in her womb."

—Henri Nouwen

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus.
Teach me to wait without worry,
to hope without fear,
to rest in Your timing
and abandon my own.
Let the ache of waiting
become the womb of new life.
Amen.

Spiritual Exercise

Set aside ten minutes each day this week to practice *hopeful waiting*. Sit in silence, name one thing you long for, and simply entrust it to Jesus. End with the simple prayer: "I wait for You, Lord—my hope is in You."

More Readings

Isaiah 40:28-31; 1 Peter 1:3

Week 2: Darkness & Light

Scripture

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned."

— Isaiah 9:2

Reflection

Take a moment and think of a few words that describe the world today. The words that come to mind probably don't include hope, peace, joy and love. The words you might think of are: partisan politics, division, anxiety, hate, sickness, death and loneliness. In a word, darkness.

In the age of social media and the 24/7 news cycle, we are more aware of the darkness in our world than ever before. This is why we need Advent.

Episcopal priest and author Fleming Rutledge writes, "Advent begins in the dark."

It's true. Advent, the four-week season of the church calendar leading up to Christmas, begins with the "people living in darkness" (Matt. 4:16). At the time of Jesus' arrival (Advent means "arrival"), the people of Israel were under Roman rule. Their land was under Roman occupation. Darkness was dominating.

All these years later, darkness is still everywhere. Advent is a time to "take a fearless inventory of the darkness," according to Rutledge. This doesn't take much work today. Every day we are bombarded with news of political division, racism, gun violence and the like.

But Advent is also a season to remember "the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." During Advent, we cling to the truth of John 1:5 – "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Jesus' first arrival fills us with hope as we remember that the world will be completely rid of darkness when He returns again to fully establish His Kingdom.

Quote

*"Advent doesn't deny the dark within us,
Advent isn't afraid of the dark around us,
Advent doesn't rush through the dark ahead of us,
Advent sits in the dark and yearns for the Light of the only One who went to the Tree of Calvary,
to shatter the dark for all of us.
Advent is waiting for the One true Light — otherwise, what we proclaim is light is actually dark,
and that is a weight no soul can bear.
Advent says the fault is not in our stars— the fault is in how we walk in the dark and call it light."
-Ann Voskamp*

Prayer

Light of the World,
We grieve the darkness in our world.
We long for your light.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Light of the World,
 enter my shadows,
 illuminate what is hidden,
 heal where there is hurt.
 Ignite a fire in my heart
 That brings light and warmth to those around me

Amen.

Spiritual Exercise

Practice taking "a fearless inventory of the darkness". Turn off the lights in the room, light a candle. Begin by inviting the Holy Spirit. Thank God for His goodness and faithfulness even in the midst of our dark world.

Write down the darkness you see in our country and the world, your city and neighborhood, and in your own heart and life. Invite God to shine His light into those places. Pray God would restore what is broken, heal what is hurting, and bring to light the evil hiding in the shadows.

As you pray, allow hope to rise up within you. Remember that when Jesus comes again, it will be the end of all darkness and He will usher in His Kingdom of light and love.

More Readings

John 1:1-18; Matthew 5:14-16; John 8:12; Psalm 18:28

Week 3: Repentance & Rest

Scripture

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength ...
 — Isaiah 30:15

Reflection

When you think of the word repentance, what comes to mind? Maybe sorrow, discipline, intensity, shame?

A word that probably doesn't first come to mind is rest. But *rest* is the exact word Isaiah pairs with repentance: "*In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.*"

Rest is the posture from which true repentance flows. We often approach it in the opposite way. When we repent, we tend to get busy. Busy trying to rid ourselves of sin by our own effort. Busy punishing ourselves or trying to earn forgiveness.

But true repentance is recognizing no amount of human effort will earn forgiveness. No amount of striving will bring us transformation. In the words of Tish Harrison Warren: "To repent is to quit our own efforts to save ourselves and to slow down enough to allow God to transform who we are."

We can also rest in knowing that the God to which we bring our repentance is not an angry judge, but a loving, merciful Father. It's His "kindness that leads us to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

Quote

"Repentance is not an emotion. It is not feeling sorry for your sins. It is a decision. It is deciding that you have been wrong in supposing that you could manage your own life and be your own god; it is deciding that you were wrong in thinking that you had, or could get, the strength, education and training to make it on your own; it is deciding that you have been told a pack of lies about yourself and your neighbors and your world. And it is deciding that God in Jesus Christ is telling you the truth."

-Eugene Peterson

Prayer

Most merciful God,
 we confess that we have sinned against you
 in thought, word and deed,
 by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
 We have not loved you with our whole heart;
 we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
 We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
 For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
 have mercy on us and forgive us;
 that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,
 to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Spiritual Exercise

Find one small way to stop this week. Skip a chore that feeds your hurry. Wake up early. Skip Netflix or scrolling on your phone. In that reclaimed time, simply be with God—no agenda. Let stillness itself become your act of repentance.

More Readings

Matthew 3:1-11; John 4:12-17; 2 Chronicles 7:14; 1 John 1:5-9

Week 4: Emptiness & Filling: Making Room for Christ

Scripture

"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."
— Luke 1:53

Reflection

In the story of Jesus' arrival, God fills empty places again and again. Empty wombs are filled. Empty skies are filled with singing angels. An empty manger filled with God Himself.

In Mary's song of praise in Luke 1, she says: *"He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."*

During Advent, we are reminded that we all are hungry, we all experience emptiness, we all feel an ache in our hearts for something more.

While the world tries to fill the void with hurry, busyness, material stuff, wealth, success, and even religion, Advent reminds us that nothing of this world can fill the emptiness in our hearts. Only the presence of God can truly fill us.

In the words of St. Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Quote

"Emptiness comes before fullness. We have to empty ourselves of anything that crowds out the life or grace of God in our lives. When we cooperate with the Spirit in this way, we become receptacles of grace. Like Jesus' mother Mary, we become God-bearers, pregnant with the divine. We are rich toward God and others. Filled full."

—Marlena Graves

Spiritual Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position, not rigid but not slouched either, and invite the presence of God. Begin by placing your hands, palms facing down, on your legs. This posture is your way of "handing over" your worries, anxiety, and emptiness to God.

Name the ways you may be feeling anxious, weary, or empty before God. Get specific about what is heavy on your heart. Surrender these feelings and circumstances to God.

After some time in silence, turn your hands around, palms facing up, the backs of your hands gently resting on your legs. As you do, ask for God to fill you with His grace, rest, peace, and love. Be open to hearing a word, seeing an image, or feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Close by thanking God for filling you with His Spirit.

More Readings

John 7:37-39; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Psalm 63