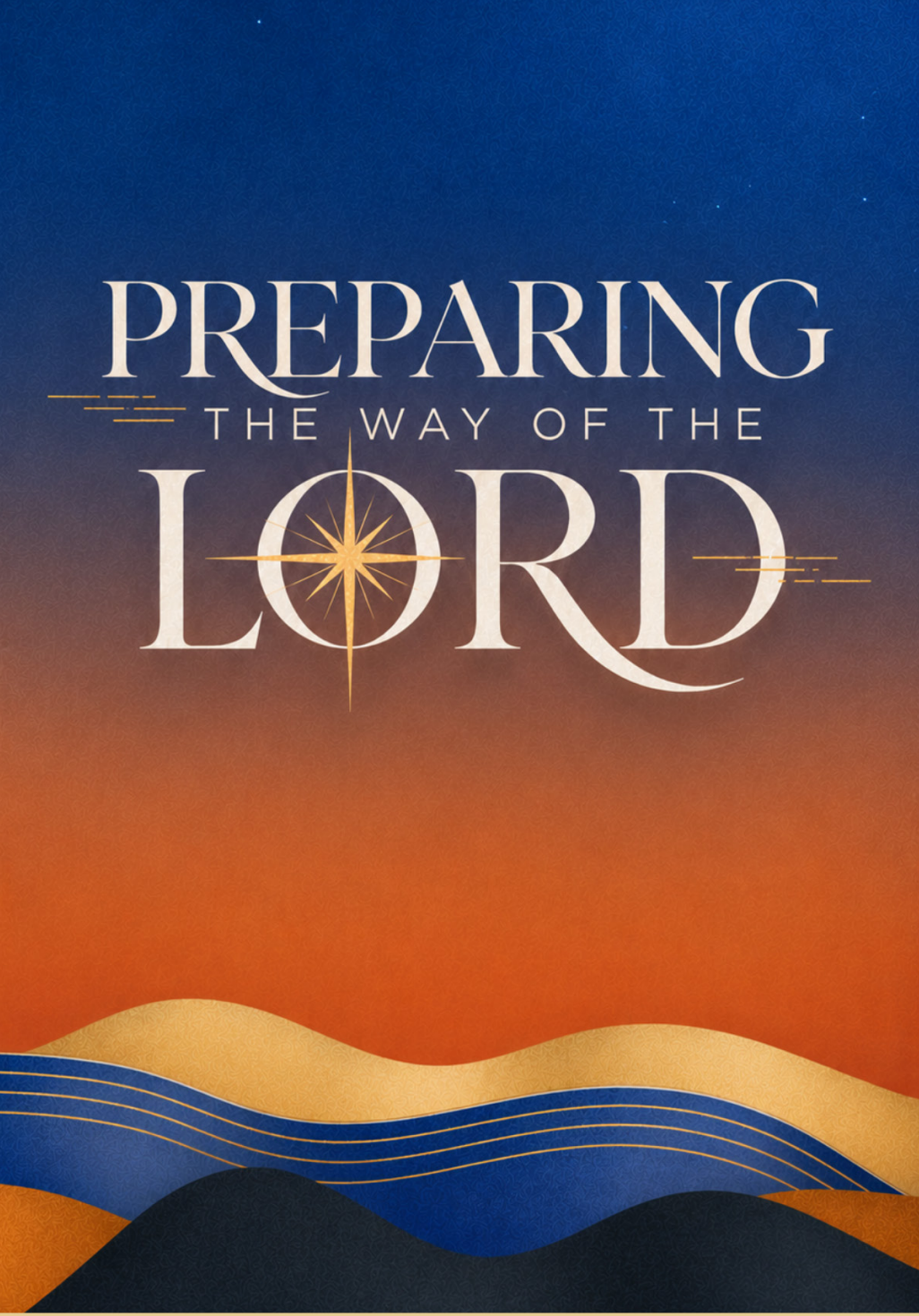



STUDY GUIDE



# Advent in the Gospels

## preparing the way of the Lord

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Dear reader,

Advent is the four-week season that leads up to the celebration of Christmas. While the world is saying “Hurry!” and “Get your shopping done!” and “Time to party!” during Advent, Jesus invites us to be still and prepare ourselves for his coming.

The coming of Jesus is twofold: we prepare to remember his first coming as a baby, born in Bethlehem. But we also prepare to welcome him at the end of the age when he returns in glory.

This will be a shorter, simpler study than our usual all-church guides. There are no memory verses, and only short invitations to action. Advent can be busy as the early Christmas celebrations of friends, work, and children arise. So this guide is designed to be an invitation to slow down, drink deeply from the Scriptures, and prepare our hearts for our coming king.

Whether you do this study alone or with a group, our hope and prayer is that it would reorient you to the true meaning of not just the Advent season but every season of our lives: the love of God for you and for the whole world, too.

On the journey with you–

*Pastor Courtney*

*Note: This study is written using the NIV translation. This translation was updated for greater accuracy in 2011. If you have an older version, some of the questions may not correspond as directly to the words in your Bible. For the sake of this study, we recommend using an updated NIV.*

# ADVENT DAILY BIBLE PLAN

Advent Reading Plan: The Return
Reading Dates: Nov. 22-Dec. 25, 2026

## Memory Verse

- *John 1:14*

**All videos are available on the PCOM app and at mypcom.com/dailybible**

***From Eden to the tabernacle, temple, and exile, Scripture tells the story of God's desire to dwell with his people. During Advent, we trace God's promises to their fulfillment in Jesus: Emmanuel, God with us.***

***CREATED FOR GOD'S PRESENCE***

- ☐ *11/22: Genesis 1:26-2:3*
- ☐ ● ***Video: Heaven & Earth***
- ☐ *11/23: Genesis 2:4-17*
- ☐ *11/24: Genesis 3:1-13*
- ☐ *11/25: Genesis 3:14-24*
- ☐ *11/26: Genesis 12:1-9*
- ☐ *11/27: Genesis 15:1-6*
- ☐ *11/28: Genesis 28:10-22*

***GOD DWELLS AMONG HIS PEOPLE***

- ☐ *11/29: Exodus 3:1-15*
- ☐ *11/30: Exodus 19:1-25*
- ☐ *12/1: Exodus 25:1-22*
- ☐ ● ***Video: Temple***
- ☐ *12/2: Exodus 29:35-46*
- ☐ *12/3: Exodus 33:7-23*
- ☐ *12/4: Exodus 40:16-38*
- ☐ *12/5: Psalm 72:1-20*

***THE KING, THE TEMPLE, AND THE EXILE***

- ☐ *12/6: 2 Samuel 7:1-29*
- ☐ *12/7: 1 Kings 8:1-21*
- ☐ *12/8: 1 Kings 8:22-30*
- ☐ *12/9: Psalm 27:1-14*
- ☐ *12/10: 2 Chronicles 36:1-23*
- ☐ *12/11: Ezekiel 11:1-25*
- ☐ ● ***Video: Exile***
- ☐ *12/12: Jeremiah 31:1-37*

***THE PROMISE OF GOD'S RETURN***

- ☐ *12/13: Ezekiel 37:1-28*
- ☐ *12/14: Isaiah 7:10-17*
- ☐ *12/15: Isaiah 9:1-7*
- ☐ ● ***Video: The Messiah***
- ☐ *12/16: Isaiah 11:1-16*
- ☐ *12/17: Isaiah 52:1-15*
- ☐ *12/18: Isaiah 53:1-12*
- ☐ *12/19: Isaiah 40:1-11*

***THE WORD BECAME FLESH***

- ☐ *12/20: Luke 1:5-25*
- ☐ *12/21: Luke 1:26-38*
- ☐ *12/22: Luke 1:39-56*
- ☐ *12/23: Matthew 1:18-25*
- ☐ *12/24: Luke 2:1-20*
- ☐ *12/25: John 1:1-18*
- ☐ ● ***Video: The Birth of Jesus***

# 1
# the meaning of advent

MATTHEW 25:31-46

**AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:**
BREATH PRAYER

A breath prayer is simply timing the words of a simple prayer to our breathing. It both helps us to remember to breathe (something we forget when we are tired or stressed!) and centers us in the love and presence of God.

For this week's spiritual practice, you are invited to pray the following words, or to come up with your own:

*(Breathe in) Lord, Jesus Christ*
*(Breathe out) Son of God*
*(Breathe in) Remind me always*
*(Breathe out) That you are here*

Return to this prayer any time you are feeling busy, exhausted, overwhelmed, or anxious this week.

**AN INVITATION TO STUDY & REFLECTION:**

The season of Advent is the very beginning of the church year. During these four weeks leading up to Christmas, we prepare for two things:

1) a celebration of Jesus's birth and
2) his ultimate and final return in glory.

The emphasis in Advent is on preparation. We are getting ready for Christmas, of course, but we must also turn our attention to preparing our hearts and lives for the return of Jesus.

In some Christian traditions, it is common to repeat the phrase: *Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.*

**Q1.** Did you grow up celebrating Advent or mostly focusing on Christmas? How did this shape your understanding of how to prepare for the season?

In her book *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ* Pastor Fleming Rutledge writes that the return of Jesus is "frightening news for anyone who has a conscience." (This is Pastor Courtney's *favorite* Advent devotional. Well worth picking up a copy, if you haven't ever read it!)

**Q2.** Why do you think she says the return of Jesus will be frightening to those of us who have a conscience? How might this impact our Advent preparations?

*Read Matthew 25:31-46 aloud. If you are studying with a group, you may wish to read two or three verses each.*

**Q3.** How might this passage of Scripture help us prepare not just to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but for his ultimate return in glory?

**Q4.** In his Christmas sermon, "A Time to Die," Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that we should "fear God's earnestness." As we prepare for his coming, we must remember that he is who he says he is. God sees all and knows all. We can't pull anything over on him, hide from him, or fool him. Do you think this is good news or bad news? Why?

**AN INVITATION TO ADVENT REFLECTION:**

Either right now (time permitting) or later on in the week, consider the following questions:

1) If Jesus came back tomorrow, would you feel ready? Why or why not?

2) If not, what would help you to feel ready?

3) If yes, what is helping you feel ready?

# 2
# keep watch

MARK 13:24-37

**AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:** REST

It can be particularly hard to rest during busy seasons like Advent. If we have children, our days may be filled with school concerts, end of year banquets, or sports games. If we are working, we may have year-end obligations or holiday parties to attend. If we are retired, we may be busier than ever!

Yet God's invitation to us to rest goes beyond seasons. It is always open to us. For this week's spiritual practice, you are invited to rest in the Lord.

For a few moments, sit comfortably and reflect on the following questions:

1) How tired do I feel?

2) Where am I holding exhaustion or stress in my body?

3) What would it feel like to rest deeply in the Lord, even while work remains undone?

Then pray, asking the God of rest to grant you rest.

**AN INVITATION TO STUDY & REFLECTION:**

*Read Mark 13:24-37 aloud.*

**Q1.** What stands out to you in this passage? Do any verses trouble you? Encourage you? What questions do you have about it?

**Q2.** What do you make of Jesus's assertion that "this generation" will not pass away before all these things come to pass? Seeing as the people he spoke to all died over a thousand years ago, what do you think he meant by "this generation"?

The idea of "keeping watch" is found throughout Scripture. Rather than falling asleep, we are to pay attention, to stay awake and alert, and to look for signs of the coming kingdom of God.

**Q3.** Jesus describes a fig tree ripening as an illustration of what it will be like when the world ends. What signs do you see in your own heart that seem like God's kingdom is on

its way? What signs do you see here in Orange County? In America? In the world?

C.S. Lewis once wrote that people tend to take one of two problematic views when it came to the occult (demons, evil, that sort of thing). Either they became too obsessed with it, focusing on it at the expense of other more important things, or they denied its existence entirely. The same could be said to be true of the end of the world. Some among us hyperfixate on it. Others ignore it. The way of Jesus is the middle way: we are not to panic, but we *are* to keep watch.

**Q4.** Do you lean more toward thinking too much about the end of the world or not taking it seriously at all? What would it look like practically for you to keep watch for the return of Jesus? Would it change anything about how you are living right now, today?

**AN INVITATION TO ADVENT PRACTICE:**

Practice keeping watch for something you know will happen this week. Perhaps its a sports draft or a friend coming to visit or a new ice cream flavor arriving in stores. As you keep watch, pay attention to how it feels inside of you to anticipate something with longing and joy. What would it look like to anticipate the return of Jesus in a similar way?

# 3
# the arrival

MARK 1:1-8

**AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:** MUSIC

Christmas brings us some of our very best worship music. But what about Advent? While countless Christmas songs have been written about the birth and celebration of Jesus, Advent songs point us instead toward our deep longing for Christ's return.

Some of our most well-known Advent songs are *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*, *O Come O Come Emmanuel*, and *Sing We the Song of Emmanuel*.

Choose one from the list above, or one of your own, and listen to the full song with your eyes closed. As you listen, tune into your own longing for Christ's return, when all will be made well once and for all.

**AN INVITATION TO STUDY & REFLECTION:**

Think about a favorite sport, music, or theater performance. What goes on behind the scenes to ready a field, arena, or stage for a performance? How many people are involved? Why is it important to get things ready for Josh Allen or Taylor Swift or Lin Manuel Miranda?

*Read Mark 1:1-8 aloud.*

In the Old Testament, there are many prophecies, or predictions about the coming Messiah. Mark begins his Gospel with a prophecy from Isaiah, but this one isn't about Jesus, it's about John! Isaiah writes about a messenger who will get things ready for Jesus to arrive.

**Q1.** What things does John the Baptist do to help get the people ready for Jesus?

**Q2.** John is kind of an odd dude. He doesn't eat normal food, dress in a normal way, or live in town with everyone else. What might John have to teach us about how God loves people on the margins? About how being a little different from the ordinary crowd might be part of what it means to follow Jesus?

**Q3.** What is repentence (v.4)? Why do you think might it be important? Why do you think John begins his ministry in this way?

**Q4.** John understands his position in light of who Jesus is. He believes he is not even worthy to untie his sandals (a job normally reserved for the lowest servant!). What is the difference between thinking badly of ourselves and practicing healthy humility?

**AN INVITATION TO ADVENT PRACTICE:**

Follow John's example of humility this week. When you get a chance to let someone go ahead of you in line or in traffic, do so. When you have a chance to serve someone food before getting your own, do so. Look for other ways to practice the art of humility whenever you can.

# 4
# the light of the world

JOHN 1:1-6

**AN INVITATION TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:** WONDER

John 1:1-14 is one of the most beautiful and cosmic passages in all of Scripture. It speaks to the universal nature of what God has done in Christ.

For today's spiritual practice, engage in wonder by digging deep into the natural world. Perhaps you want to sit outside in your yard, walk on the beach, or watch a show about our amazing world (Pastor Courtney highly recommends "Fantastic Fungi" on Netflix. Yes, really.) Open your eyes, your ears, and your heart to the wonder of God's creation.

The same God who hung the stars and paints the sunsets comes to us at Christmastime as a baby, and will come again in glory! Take a moment and wonder at that!

Then reflect in a time of quiet prayer. *You may wish to use the following words: Jesus, thank you for this big, beautiful world. Help me to see your hand at work everywhere I look, and inside of me, too.*

**AN INVITATION TO STUDY & REFLECTION:**

*Read John 1:1-6 aloud.*

In the original Greek language, the word for "word" is logos. Logos doesn't just mean word, it also means reason, logic, or even speech. Here John is making a play on words that Jesus is *the* Word. God's Word to us isn't just letters on a page, it is a person!

**Q1.** What was in the beginning with God? Who helped God create the world?

John loves simple words: light, life, word, world. (Contrast this to the Apostle Paul who loves flowery language!) Yet these simple words convey deep, deep truths.

**Q2.** Spend a few moments with verse four. What is John telling us here? What does it mean to you?

**Q3.** Now spend a few moments with verse five. What do you think it means? Are there any examples in your own life from when you have found this to be true?

**Q4.** Replace the name “John” in verse six with your own name (and the word “man” with “woman” if that fits you better!). Now read the verse aloud. Just as God sent John the Baptist, God is also sending you! How might you live into that truth this week?

**AN INVITATION TO ADVENT PRACTICE:**

Light a candle. Sit and watch it for a few moments, and as you do, meditate on Jesus returning in glory, as the light of the whole world.

**JOIN US FOR CHRISTMAS EVE!**

Christmas Eve services at PCOM this year are at 5:00pm and 6:15pm in The Commons as well as 7:30pm in the sanctuary. All three will end with candlelight. Invite your family, friends, and neighbors to celebrate with us as we remember the birth of Jesus together with joy!

**Bibliography & Suggestions for Further Reading:**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Learning to Die"
C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*
C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
Enuma Okoro, *Silence and Other Surprising Gifts of Advent*
Fleming Rutledge, *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ*
Howard Thurman, *The Mood of Christmas*

## A Place for Prayer Requests

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