

ADVENT

reading guide

GOSPEL COMMUNITY CHURCH
gospelcc.org



INTRODUCTION



INCARNATION S ————— GOD DWELLS AMONG US

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

JOHN 1:14

Few things shape us like stories—the ones we tell ourselves, the ones we believe, and the ones we live within. Advent tells the story of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us in the person of Jesus. The theological term for this is incarnation, meaning to exist in a human body. The journey of Advent is an embodied one. We construct our Advent wreaths and light candles. We open and read the Scriptures both in solitude and in community. We worship, pray, sing, and anticipate the day of Christ’s birth—the day God became flesh. And together we wait for the day when Christ returns to make all things new.

Advent is a season for contemplating the meaning of God with us. What could it mean that God, the eternal and invisible Creator and Sustainer of all things would take on a human body like ours? The contrast is stark and jarring. It’s also a season of encountering the God who is with us. What could it be like to be with Jesus and to be transformed by him—body, mind, heart, and soul? The meaning of the word Advent is, “arrival” or “coming”. The season of Advent invites us into that meaning. God has come to us in the person of Jesus, and he is coming again. How also might God in Christ be coming to me now?

The late Irish philosopher and poet John O’Donohue once said that we could think of the visible world as the first shoreline to the invisible world. In other words, this physical world inhabits a larger, spiritual world. And a human being in a physical body is the invisible made visible. Perhaps we are not a physical body with a soul inside, but rather a body within a larger soul. What if all that we can see is evidence of all that we cannot see? This is the theme of incarnation. And this is the heart of the text: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

“We beheld his glory”

JOHN 1:14

The practices that hold this season together invite us into the story of the Gospel on more than an intellectual level. Spending time engaging our body, mind, heart, and soul in the practices of Advent invites us to the shoreline where the visible world meets the invisible. God is not as far off as we might think. And though we might often miss God in the pace of our work-a-day lives, God is still with us. The invitation then is to slow down our way of life to be with God and to behold His glory in the face of Jesus. This is a matter of attention.

One of the great challenges of the church calendar's seasons has been the way they can become so predictable that they become invisible. We already know the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. We've done the candles, we've heard the story, and we can become so familiar with it all that it fades from relevance. We could liken this to glancing at a painting, assuming we can see what's going on, and then quickly moving on without noticing the textures that make it beautiful. But the more we behold something truly beautiful, the richer our encounter with it becomes.

That is how we see this guide and the practices of Advent—they are the textures of the story of God that re-engage our attention and imagination. Hope is an ever-widening horizon of possibility. Peace is an endlessly deep well. Joy is a breathtaking landscape. And love is an ever-expanding world of meaning.

TEXTURES X ATTENTION

These themes are not in the abstract during Advent - they are textured and brought into our real lives in the person of Jesus. The physical acts of lighting candles, opening the scriptures, and gathering with the people of God to sing and pray, these embodied practices invite us to encounter the living Jesus who is himself Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love made flesh and dwelling among us.

B

Lectio
Divina,
which
means
“divine
reading”

E

R

“The
Word...
full of
grace and
truth”

- John 1:14

Be
Read
Encounter
Apply
Devote

A

D

This guide
is
designed
to help us
encounter
God
through
His Word
on a daily
basis
through
practices
of
attention.

We'll borrow from the ancient way of reading Scripture and prayer known as *Lectio Divina*, which literally means "divine reading". Eugene Peterson offered the translation, "the art of spiritual reading". The invitation is to slowly read through the selected Scriptures each day through Morning and Evening Prayer. And as we do, come with an expectation to encounter Christ as your Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.

There will be weekly writings called, "Textures" that are designed to prepare us to see the week's theme in a unique light. Those textures will align with the teaching from that Sunday gathering.

Following the textures, you'll see daily Scriptures and an invitation to read them in the mode of *Lectio Divina*. To help with this, we offer the B.R.E.A.D model:

Be: First, be still. Calm and quiet your whole self before God in two minutes of silence and solitude. Consider simple prayers you can pray in one deep breath: "Open my eyes that I might see wonderful things in Your Word." or "Come, Holy Spirit."

Read: Read each of the Scriptures listed for morning prayer (and again at evening prayer) two times through. Read them slowly, paying close attention to what stands out to you. Consider making a note of that which stood out to you in the space for reflection in the guide, in your own journal, or in the margins of your Bible.

Encounter: Return to what stood out to you, and take that to the Lord in prayer. Ask the Spirit to reveal to you what about this text is calling for your attention right now. Ask: How might God be speaking to my heart through His Word? Write out a short reflection in the space provided in the guide or in your own journal.

Apply: Turning our attention outward, consider how you might live with this encounter with God through His Word in mind. What needs to change in my life? Are there decisions that need to be made, ways of being that need to be embraced or undone, or are there people to be pursued? Include this in your reflection.

Devote: Conclude the time with a short written prayer, devoting yourself to God. Give over to God the time between now and the next moment of embodied prayer, asking him to fill that space and time with his presence and power.

At the end of each week go back and reflect on all that you wrote and read. What do you now notice about what you noticed each day? Are there any themes you are seeing? Carry these observations with you in your practices for the next week.

Grace & peace to you on this journey.

HOPE

week 1



Take a moment

and remember a time when you felt hopeful. Perhaps there was a lightness to your step or the feeling of something like a breath of fresh air. Hope is beautiful and life-giving. Yet anytime we experience it, we are also in a time of waiting because hope is the anticipation of something that is coming. This anticipation could be toward something we look forward to experiencing or deliverance from a current hardship. As wonderful as hope is, waiting is not always enjoyable. And without hope, waiting or enduring can be downright devastating. Those moments of darkness can feel overwhelming when we have lost sight of all that is good. Where do we find hope when all seems lost?

SUNDAY

HAVE YOU EVER noticed that hope is contagious? Those walking in despair can begin to experience relief when they encounter someone who is filled with hope. That person may be delivering good news or simply being present while we wait. During Advent, we fix our eyes on Jesus who is Emmanuel-God with us. Jesus chose to leave the glory of heaven in order to enter into our story and make a way for us to be with Him. He is both the hope-filled presence who chooses to walk this life with us and the promised deliverance which guarantees our future.

Jesus invites us to walk this journey with Him day by day. Rather than being pressured to be hopeful for Jesus, we can rely on His confident expectation of the future to stir up hope within us. He sees the whole picture and knows how it will all turn out and journeys with us each day to share His hope with us. How does it impact you when you encounter Jesus, knowing that He is hope?

As you read through the Bible readings this week, ask how these truths give Jesus hope for the future? How does sitting with Jesus and His hope impact your outlook on today and the days to come?

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Matthew 24:36-44

Romans 13:11-end



MONDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 42:18-end
Psalm 1, 2, 3
Revelation 19

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 25:1-9
Psalm 4, 7
Matthew 12:1-21

TUESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 43:1-13
Psalm 5, 6, 8
Revelation 20

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 26:1-13
Psalm 9, 10
Matthew 12:22-37



WEDNESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Psalm 47, 147:1-12

John 12:20-32

Evening *prayer*

Zechariah 8:20-end

Psalm 87, 96

John 1:35-42

THURSDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 44:1-8

Psalms 14, 15, 16

Revelation 21:9-21

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 28:14-end

Psalms 18

Matthew 13:1-23

FRIDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 44:9-23

Psalms 17, 19

Revelation 21:22-22:5

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 29:1-14

Psalms 22

Matthew 13:24-43



SATURDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 44:24-45:13

Psalms 20, 21, 23

Revelation 22:6-end

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 29:15-end

Psalms 24, 25

Matthew 13:44-end



PEACE

week 2



Our bodies have a way of getting our attention.

If we touch something hot, our hand sends an urgent message to the brain and the brain moves the body. Our bodies can sense what our eyes and minds may not always perceive. This is true of memories and anxieties as well as physical sensations.

Our bodies hold these things.

To practice incarnation is to be fully present in our bodies, at this moment, with those around us. These are the same limits Jesus the Son of God chose to embrace, bless, and redeem. Being present is connected to being at peace. If our minds are all over the place, exploring every scenario, holding the pain of a thousand memories or possibilities, all at once, it becomes too much for us to bear.

And our bodies faithfully warn us when we're nearing information overload.

Stress and anxiety show up oftentimes in a tight chest, a nervous stomach, a racing mind, or tension in our neck and shoulders. Our bodies carry stress, even when we try to distract our minds from noticing. Relief from anxiety doesn't come from avoiding the past or present, or by trying to control the future. Those things only cause anxieties to multiply within us (Psalm 94:19).

Peace is the presence of Jesus, God with us.

As we explore the practices and scriptures for this week, notice your body. Are you carrying any stress? Any hurriedness? Practice attending to the ways your body is signaling to you what you are holding, and then offer those burdens to God in your morning and evening prayers. And expectantly wait for that mysterious peace that surpasses our understanding as we walk with Jesus this week.

SUNDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72
Matthew 3:1-12
Romans 15:4-13

Evening *prayer*

*Please spend time this
Sunday evening to reflect
on the past week.*

MONDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 45:14-end
Psalm 27, 30
1 Thessalonians 1

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 30:1-18
Psalm 26, 28,
29 Matthew 14:1-12



TUESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 46

Psalms 32, 36

Thessalonians 2:1-12

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 30:19-end

Psalms 33

Matthew 14:13-end

WEDNESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 47

Psalms 34

Thessalonians

2:13-end

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 31

Psalms 119:33-56

Matthew 15:1-20





THURSDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 48:1-11

Psalm 37

1 Thessalonians 3

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 32

Psalm 39, 40

Matthew 15:21-28

FRIDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 48:12-end

Psalm 31

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 33:1-22

Psalm 35

Matthew 15:29-end

SATURDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 49:1-13

Psalm 41, 42, 43

1 Thessalonians

4:13-end

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 35

Psalm 45, 46

Matthew 16:1-12



God in His goodness created so many things in this world which can bring delight and joy. How amazing is it that He made majestic sunsets that can take our breath away and then purposefully made us in such a way that we can experience their beauty. The other side of reality is the presence of hardships in this life that have the potential to deflate our joy. The key word is potential. There is a depth to joy that can endure beyond our circumstances, and Jesus is the perfect image of this. Hebrews 12:2 calls us to “keep our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross.” While Jesus walked this earth, he experienced the conflicting emotions of joy and agony. He understands the “and” of emotions—within a moment’s time we can experience gratitude and grief; relief and pain. We are so much freer to embrace all of these when we walk through them with a trustworthy Guide.

Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, our guide through grief and into joy. It is in Christ that we are empowered to live out James 1:2 which calls us to “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials.” Because God is with us. Also, after reminding us of our awaiting inheritance in Christ, Peter states, “You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7) Choosing joy day by day no matter our circumstances is really the choice to be with Jesus day by day. Jesus is more committed to our joy than we are.

JOY

week 3



The invitation this week is to notice the both/and within the Scriptures. Oftentimes within the same chapter, we will see both hardships and God's faithful presence. How does spending time with Jesus allow you to shed light on present circumstances in such a way that you can embrace both the sadness and beauty of today? What does it look like to consider it joy to walk through today with Jesus, come what may?

SUNDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalms 146:4-10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11



MONDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 49:14-25

Psalm 44

Thessalonians 5:1-11

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 38:1-8, 21-22

Psalm 47, 49

Matthew 16:13-end

TUESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 50

Psalm 48, 52

1 Thessalonians 5:12-end

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 38:9-20

Psalm 50

Matthew 17:1-13



WEDNESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 51:1-8

Psalms 119:57-80

2 Thessalonians 1

Evening *prayer*

Isaiah 39

Psalms 59, 60, 67

Matthew 17:14-21

THURSDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 51:9-16

Psalms 56, 57, 63

2 Thessalonians 2

Evening *prayer*

Zephaniah 1:1-2:3

Psalms 61, 62, 64

Matthew 17:22-end

FRIDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 51:17-end

Psalms 51, 54

2 Thessalonians 3

Evening *prayer*

Zephaniah 3:1-13

Psalms 38

Matthew 18:1-20

SATURDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 52:1-12

Psalms 68

Jude

Evening *prayer*

Zephaniah 3:14-end

Psalms 65, 66

Matthew 18:21-end



LOVE

week 4



The neuroscientist, Dr. Curt Thompson, said, "We are all looking for someone looking for us, and we remain in this mode of searching for the rest of our lives." Should we never look eyes with one who has been looking for us, we will have lived a loveless life. And a loveless life is an unbearable life. But Advent announces the good news that there is more love to be known in this world than our hearts can stand.

"We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19). These words echo throughout the entirety of the Bible and of the human experience. God's first act of love in creating the world and filling it with goodness and beauty continues to haunt us with the possibility of meaning in this world. Then, God arrives on the shoreline of the visible world he's made in the person of Jesus and gives His life away even unto death, because of His great love for the world he made.

"God is love", the Scriptures say (1 John 4:8). And we're made to live in and from that belovedness. To give it and receive it from both God and others. And the practices of Advent invite us to experience the reality of this love more than simply acknowledging its possibility intellectually. Henri Nouwen spoke of this incarnational experience of love in His book, "Life of the Beloved":

"As long as 'being the Beloved' is little more than a beautiful thought or a lofty idea that hangs above my life to keep me from becoming depressed, nothing really changes. What is required is to become the Beloved in the commonplaces of my daily existence, and bit by bit to close the gap that exists between what I know myself to be and the countless realities of everyday life. Becoming the Beloved is pulling the truth revealed to me from above down into the ordinariness of what I am thinking of, talking about, and doing from hour to hour."



The invitation for this week is to carry the possibility of being beloved by God and by others in the commonplaces of our daily existence. Let's enter each day, eyes wide open to the presence of God and His love for us in Christ, moment by moment.



SUNDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80

Matthew 1:18-end

Romans 1:1-7

MONDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalms 144, 146

2 Peter 1:1-15

Evening *prayer*

Malachi 1

Psalms 10, 57

Matthew 19:1-12

TUESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 54

Psalms 46, 95

2 Peter 1:16-2:3

Evening *prayer*

Malachi 2:1-16

Psalms 4, 9

Matthew 19:13-15

WEDNESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 55

Psalms 121, 122, 123

2 Peter:2-4-end

Evening *prayer*

Malachi 2:17-3:12

Psalms 80, 84

Matthew 19:16-end

THURSDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 56:1-8

Psalms 124, 125, 126, 127

2 Peter 3

Evening *prayer*

Malachi 3:13-4:end

Psalms 24, 48

Matthew 23:1-12





FRIDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 63:1-6

Psalms 128, 129, 130, 131

2 John

Evening *prayer*

Nahum 1

Psalms 89:1-37

Matthew 23:13-28

CHRIST

week 5



Come Thou Long Expected Jesus
By Charles Wesley

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.



SATURDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 58

Psalms 45, 113

3 John

Evening *prayer*

Zechariah 2

Psalms 85

Revelation 1:1-8



A lit candle sits in the center of the page, its flame glowing warmly. The candle is surrounded by a teal-colored cloth that is draped and folded. In the upper left corner, there are green leaves, possibly from a plant like ivy. In the upper right corner, a portion of an open book is visible, showing text from a religious text. The overall atmosphere is quiet and contemplative.

SUNDAY

Morning *prayer*

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalms 96

Luke 2:1-14

Titus 2

MONDAY

Morning *prayer*

2 Chronicles 24:20-22

Psalms 119:161-168

Acts 7:51-end

Matthew 10:17-22

Evening *prayer*

Psalms 57, 86

Genesis 4:1-10

Matthew 23:34-end

TUESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Psalms 97

Isaiah 6:1-8

1 John 5:1-12

Evening *prayer*

Psalms 21, 147

Exodus 33:12-end

1 John 2:1-11





WEDNESDAY

Morning *prayer*

Psalm 123, 128
Isaiah 49:14-25
Mark 10:13-16

Evening *prayer*

Psalm 36, 146
Genesis 37:13-20
Matthew 18:1-10

THURSDAY

Morning *prayer*

Psalm 19, 20
Isaiah 57:15-end
John 1:1-18

Evening *prayer*

Psalm 131, 132
Jonah 1
Colossians 1:1-14

FRIDAY

Morning *prayer*

Psalms 111, 112, 113

Isaiah 59:1-15

John 1:19-28

Evening *prayer*

Psalms 65, 84

Jonah 2

Colossians 1:15-23

SATURDAY

Morning *prayer*

Psalms 102

Isaiah 59:15-end

John 1:29-34





*The light shines
in the darkness,*

*and the darkness
has not overcome it.*

John 1:5

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