How to Use This Guide
S T A R T H E R E

This year's Advent Guide was designed with the whole church in mind. Whether you're coming to it single, married, as a large family unit, or as a small group, we believe that God has prepared something special here for you. Some of it will look familiar—we get to sing songs, dig into God's Word, and answer reflective questions designed to help us better meditate on this wonderful season. Some of it will be new—this year's guide focuses on 25 biblical rulers and how they point us to Jesus! **While we will not be providing candles this year, we still encourage you to get four candles for your family to use—one for each of the four weeks.**

The first day of each week will be slightly longer than the others with the lighting of the new candle but not by much. Don't feel the pressure of having a perfectly curated 30 minutes of focused time in the evenings. Come to this guide as you are—with the screaming babies, the energized toddlers, the "too-cool-for-this" pre-teens, the spiritually hungry young adults, and the seasoned believers. Come with the anticipation that God sees you in the midst of the seasonal chaos and is excited to meet you there!

Each day, we will start with a theologically-rich Christmas song to reinforce the four pillars of Advent—Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. We encourage you to worship alone, with your group, or with your family. You can Google the lyrics and tackle it acapella. You can find a version from your favorite artist to pull up on your TV or play it on your phone. No matter how you choose to approach it, "*come into His presence with singing!" (Psalm 100:2).*

We also encourage you to read the daily passages out loud. Look and listen for signs of Jesus in the texts! Then answer the questions, and think about what Christ has done for us. Finally, end each devotional time with prayer, thanking God and praising Him for this wonderful time of year!

No matter how you use this guide, we pray that it blesses you and gives you many opportunities to keep Jesus at the center of your holiday activities. As we approach Christmas, let us worship God with joyful expectancy for, *"When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5).*

WEEK OF HOPE

What is Advent? The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus,* which means "coming" or "arrival." It's a special season where we remember Jesus's humble birth and anticipate His glorious second coming. Advent invites us to pause, reflect, rejoice, and watch with expectation.

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, life can feel like a whirlwind. From turkey to tinsel, from feasting to gift-wrapping, the excitement of the season can easily make us slip into stress. But it doesn't have to be that way! What if, this month, we focused our attention on honoring Jesus's first coming while eagerly awaiting His return?

That simple shift in perspective can transform the tension of the season into hope as it anchors us in the promises of God. As we move through Advent, God is delighted to draw us deeper into the comfort and richness of His promises.

But what's with the candles? The lighting of the four candles is a vivid reminder of Jesus as the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4–9, 8:12). Each week, we light a new candle to build anticipation for Christmas Eve. At our candlelight service, we light the final Christ Candle to symbolize Jesus's first coming.

The growing light in the darkness beautifully reflects the story of the Gospel. Beyond any particular tradition, Advent carries deep significance for the Church. It offers all believers a chance to reflect on God's promise to send us a Savior, a promise fulfilled perfectly in Jesus, who came to triumph over sin and death forever!

November 29 – Day 1 / Melchizedek, King of Salem

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Joy to the World”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Genesis 14; Hebrews 7

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Melchizedek may be one of the Bible’s most mysterious figures, but he plays an astounding role in redemptive history. He was a “priest of God Most High” long before God established the Levitical priesthood, and Scripture calls him the “king of righteousness” and “king of peace.” He came out to meet Abram, bringing bread and wine, blessing him, and pointing forward to Jesus, the ultimate High Priest and King.

  Like Melchizedek, Jesus is both King and Priest, but He is infinitely greater. In fact, He is the perfect fulfillment of all that Melchizedek foreshadowed. As we start this Advent season, these passages remind us that Jesus is the true King of righteousness and peace. He took on flesh to live the perfect life we could never live, and He accomplished our redemption through His death and resurrection.

  And unlike earthly priests who have temporary ministries, Jesus holds an eternal priesthood. He continually intercedes for His people and is able to “save to the uttermost” those who draw near to God through Him.

  That is a beautiful invitation for us today! Melchizedek gives us a glimpse of the gospel, but Jesus is the glorious reality of its fulfillment. Will you come to Him?

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do you notice about Melchizedek’s encounter with Abram and the ways Hebrews describes Jesus’s priesthood?

  2. How does Jesus’s eternal priesthood and His role as both King and Priest help you understand the hope we have in Him?

  3. What keeps you from drawing near to Jesus during this season? What is one way you can trust and depend on Him more fully this Advent?

November 30 – Day 2 / Pharaoh of Exodus

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Exodus 7; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Pharaoh, the hard-hearted ruler of Egypt, repeatedly opposed God and His mission to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Over and over again, Pharaoh refused to let God’s people go free, even after the death of his firstborn son. His violent opposition towards God is a far cry from Jesus, who willingly laid down His life to accomplish God’s plan of salvation.

  Like Pharaoh, we often harden our hearts toward the call of God on our lives. We wrestle with disobedience, spiritual wandering, and hearts that are prone to stubborn resistance. But when we come to Jesus, He gives us new hearts and transforms us into people who delight in doing our Father’s will.

  This is part of the wonder we remember during Advent: God didn’t leave His people waiting in bondage to sin and death. He came to us! Jesus entered our world as a humble King, not arriving with the power and pride of Pharaoh, but coming in humility, gentleness, and obedience.

  Now, Jesus leads us in an even greater Exodus than the one the Israelites experienced. He leads us out of death and into life as our triumphant Ruler, the Savior-King who perfectly obeyed the voice of God and purchased our freedom!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What stands out to you when you compare Pharaoh’s hardened heart with God’s heart for reconciliation?

  2. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. What does it mean to be made new in Christ?

  3. Where do you see a tendency to resist God’s will in your own life? What is one practical step you can take toward obedience this Advent?

December 1 – Day 3 / King Abimelech

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “O Come, All Ye Faithful”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Judges 9; Philippians 2:1-11

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Abimelech was a power-hungry ruler who sought to establish his throne through conspiracy, treachery, and violence. His father, Gideon, was a judge of Israel whom God used to deliver His people from Midian and tear down the altars of Baal. But Abimelech didn’t follow in his father’s footsteps. Instead, he embodied the selfish ambition that pervades the book of Judges, a time when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes”.

  Consumed by his desire for power, Abimelech killed 70 of his brothers to secure his throne. His rule was an affront to God and His Kingship, and it gives us a picture of the devastation that comes when we are left to our own desires and devices. But thankfully, God loved His people too much to leave them there.

  During this Advent season, we look to Jesus, the righteous and rightful King who is completely different from the rulers of this world. He didn’t grasp after power or use His position for selfish gain. Instead, He “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” The King of Heaven willingly left His throne, humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!

  Abimelech reminds us of the destruction that comes when we seek to exalt ourselves. Jesus shows us the glory of a King who humbled Himself for the sake of His people. He left His throne to ransom us, but He didn’t remain in the manger or in the grave. He is risen, exalted, and seated in glory forever!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. How do Abimelech and Jesus pursue and use power differently in today’s passages?

  2. What does Jesus’s example in Philippians 2 teach us about true greatness and the kind of King He is?

  3. Where are you tempted to seek recognition, power, or control? What is one practical way you can lay aside your preferences or ambitions to serve others this Advent?

December 2 – Day 4 / King Saul

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Angels We Have Heard On High”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 1 Samuel 15; Isaiah 53

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: After Israel demanded that Samuel, their prophet and judge, appoint a king for them, Saul seemed to fit the bill perfectly. As a young, tall, and handsome young man, he looked every bit the part of a mighty ruler. But Saul had a fickle heart, and his reign was marked by disobedience. After just two years, he turned away from God, offering an unlawful sacrifice and repeatedly refusing to obey the voice of the Lord.

  Like the Israelites, we are often tempted to exchange the perfect reign of our Heavenly Father for the promises and authority of worldly rulers. We look for security, hope, and salvation in people and things that were never meant to bear that weight. But like Saul, they ultimately fail us.

  During Advent, we are invited to place our hope in the steady rule of Jesus, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He didn’t come in worldly splendor or earthly majesty, but in humility, taking on flesh and dwelling among us.

  Isaiah reminds us that Jesus “had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” Yet the King who didn’t come with outward glory is the very King who bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, and conquered sin and death on our behalf. This Advent, let’s not place our hope in authorities who will pass away, but in the King whose throne will never be shaken!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What does 1 Samuel 15 reveal about Saul’s failure as king? What details in Isaiah 53 stand out to you about the suffering servant God promises?

  2. What makes Jesus a King worthy of our trust, even when His ways differ from our expectations?

  3. Where are you tempted to look for security or control apart from God? What is one way you can surrender that fear and trust Jesus’s rule in your life this Advent?

December 3 – Day 5 / King David

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Samuel 7:1-17; Luke 1:26-38

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King David was the best and godliest of all the kings of Israel, but even the “man after God’s own heart” had a reign marked by heavy bloodshed, adultery, and a wicked census. As a shepherd-boy turned mighty king, David was a shadow of a far greater Ruler who was still to come.

  David is a picture of us—a complicated mixture of faithfulness and failure. We may genuinely desire to follow God, but we still allow sin, pride, and selfishness to creep into our hearts. Even the best earthly rulers or our best efforts can’t save us from sin and death. We need a King who could do what David (and the rest of us) could never do.

  During this Advent season, we look to Jesus, our Shepherd-King, who is the beautiful fulfillment of God’s covenant with David. Unlike David, Jesus ushered in a kingdom marked by perfect peace, pure devotion to His Father, and complete righteousness. He is the Son of David who never wandered from the will of God, never gave Himself over to sin, and never failed His people.

  Our Good Shepherd didn’t rule from a throne of earthly power, but laid down His life for His sheep. He willingly gave Himself to rescue and redeem His people, conquering sin and death so that we might belong to Him forever!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do these passages tell us about the King who is coming? What do you notice about His kingdom, His throne, and how long He will reign?

  2. How does Jesus fulfill God’s promise to David? What makes His Kingship different from that of earthly rulers?

  3. Where are you tempted to rely on your own strength, wisdom, or goodness rather than His grace? What is one way you can rest more fully in Jesus and trust His faithfulness this Advent?

December 4 – Day 6 / King Solomon

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 1 Kings 3:1-15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Solomon reigned over Israel after his father, David, in a display of wealth and wisdom that had never been seen before or since. But despite all his knowledge and discernment, Solomon still fell into great sin. His many foreign wives turned his heart toward idolatry, and he ended his days with a sobering promise from God: his magnificent kingdom would be torn away from his son.

  If Solomon couldn’t be the kind of king we needed, even after receiving wisdom during a personal encounter with God, then who could? The people of God needed more than a ruler endowed with earthly wisdom. We needed God Himself.

  During this Advent season, we look to Jesus, who is far greater than a wise man sitting on an earthly throne. He is the “power and wisdom of God”, the only One who possesses perfect wisdom and the only One able to accomplish our sanctification and redemption.

  Today, we worship our only wise King in all His majesty and radiance. The wisdom of God came to us in the person of Jesus, the King who infinitely outshines the splendor of Solomon. He is the King of Righteousness, and the One in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do you notice about the wisdom God gives Solomon in 1 Kings 3 and the wisdom Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31?

  2. Why is Jesus greater than even the wisest earthly rulers? What does His life and work teach us about the true source of wisdom?

  3. What influences are pulling your heart away from wholehearted devotion to God? What is one way you can intentionally seek Jesus’s wisdom this Advent?

December 5 – Day 7 / King Rehoboam

Light the candle of Hope. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Hope of the Ages” by Sovereign Grace Music

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 1 Kings 12:1-24; Isaiah 9:1-7

Reflect on the devotional, and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: The terrifying promise God gave to Solomon came to pass quickly. King Rehoboam, Solomon’s wicked and wayward son, ruled only briefly before his foolish actions split the kingdom of Israel in two. He abandoned the ways of God, instead heeding the advice of his young and unwise counselors. His mistake led Judah into disgusting and evil acts, “more than all that their fathers had done.”

  Like Rehoboam, we are easily enticed by the slick voices of the surrounding culture. Left to our own devices, we usually make the wrong choices and face the consequences for them. We listen to the voices promising happiness, success, and fulfillment, only to discover that the wisdom of the world can’t lead us where we truly need to go. We need a Counselor whose wisdom is perfect and whose guidance is always true.

  During this Advent season, we look to Jesus, the promised “Wonderful Counselor” who came to lead His people in the way of life. Unlike Rehoboam, Jesus never listened to the foolish counsel of the world or turned away from the wisdom of His Father. He knew the will of God and perfectly obeyed it.

  The world is filled with voices competing for our attention, but Jesus speaks a better word. His counsel doesn’t lead us into destruction, but into life. When we are confused, He gives wisdom. When we are wandering, He leads us home. When we have followed foolish voices and fallen into sin, He doesn’t leave us there. He calls us to repentance and offers forgiveness when we come to Him. Where do you need to humbly seek His counsel today?

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What differences do you notice between Rehoboam’s leadership and the way Isaiah describes the reign of the promised King?

  2. What is the significance of Jesus being called the Wonderful Counselor? How does His perfect wisdom offer us something the world’s counsel can’t?

  3. What messages from the world are you tempted to believe over God’s Word? What is one way you can become more intentional about following Jesus’s counsel this Advent?

WEEK OF PEACE

For the second week of Advent, we will be shifting our focus to Peace. During a season that often feels crowded, chaotic, and full of expectation, it's easy to let anxiety take center stage. The holiday hustle, the endless to-do lists, and the pressure to get everything "just right" can weigh heavily on our hearts.

Yet, in the midst of the noise, Jesus offers a peace that is unlike anything the world can give us. He tells us in His Word: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).

The peace of Christ isn't dependent on perfect circumstances. It doesn't disappear when life feels out of control, and it remains constant even when our plans go awry. In fact, it often shines brightest in the middle of the storms we face. The world may offer us peace, but it's fleeting. The second our comfort is gone, our safety is compromised, or conflict rears its ugly head, we fall back into a spiral of doubt and dread.

But there is good news! We don't have to settle for the world's cheap peace, because Jesus offers us something that is enduring and steadfast. His peace meets us exactly where we are, offering calm in the chaos, and breathing new life into the places of death and darkness. This is the peace that surpasses understanding! It's a peace that carries us through the season, into the joy of Christmas and beyond, anchoring our hearts in the unwavering presence of Christ!

December 6 – Day 8 / King Jeroboam I

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Emmanuel” by Sovereign Grace Music

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 1 Kings 12:25-33; Jeremiah 23:1-8

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: After Rehoboam’s foolish words to the people, they rebelled and made Jeroboam king over ten of Israel’s twelve tribes. The Lord had previously given Jeroboam a promise: “I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you,” if only he would follow God and keep His commandments. Unfortunately, Jeroboam didn’t heed that warning.

  As he looked at his new kingdom, Jeroboam quickly noticed a problem. God had appointed Jerusalem as the place for sacrifices, but the people of Israel would now need to enter Rehoboam’s territory to worship there. Fearing that these pilgrimages would turn their hearts back toward the house of David, Jeroboam built two golden calves and commanded the people to worship them instead. He didn’t anticipate that his sin and idolatry would ultimately lead to the destruction of the entire northern kingdom.

  Like Jeroboam, we are often inclined to devise our own solutions instead of waiting on God and His timing. We mistrust the character of our Father, insisting that we know better and can get ourselves out of the messes we find ourselves in. But our attempts to take control often lead us further into disaster.

  In Jeremiah, the prophet speaks of a righteous Branch from the line of David who will gather God’s scattered people and rule with wisdom and justice. Jesus is the beautiful fulfillment of that prophecy, our King of Righteousness who leads us out of exile and restores us to God. Unlike Jeroboam, Jesus followed His Father’s commandments perfectly, living out the obedience we could never achieve on our own. He is the wonderful Shepherd, the One who cares for us and teaches us to “fear no more”!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What stands out to you about Jeroboam’s decisions and God’s promises concerning the future King in these passages?

  2. What do today’s passages teach you about the difference between relying on your own plans and trusting God's character?

  3. What fears are tempting you to rely on your own solutions instead of trusting God? What is one way you can surrender control and trust His faithfulness this week?

December 7 – Day 9 / King Asa

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 1 Kings 15:9-15; 2 Chronicles 16:1-10; Isaiah 11:1-5

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Asa, the grandson of Rehoboam, is a breath of fresh air after the reigns of several wicked kings in Israel and Judah. The beginning of his reign hearkens back to David’s faithfulness to God. Asa rejected the wickedness of his fathers, and he purged the land of pagan practices and idols.

  Asa was “wholly true to the Lord all his days.” The people of Judah must have looked at him and wondered, *Could Asa be the promised Messiah?* Yet, like David before him, Asa couldn’t remain faithful to the end. Late in his reign, he doubted the Lord’s provision, even after experiencing a miraculous victory over the armies of Ethiopia. Instead of trusting God, Asa turned to Syria for help, incurring God’s anger and the promise of perpetual war.

  It’s not hard to see ourselves in Asa. Even when the Lord provides for us time and again, we still find ourselves wrestling with moments of doubt. And often, that doubt leads us into sin as we look to other sources of power and provision for our answers. We strive to be wholly faithful to God, only to stumble when fear or uncertainty takes hold.

  Thankfully, God had a better Messiah in mind than King Asa. Jesus is the “shoot from the stump of Jesse,” the One who rules with the Spirit of wisdom, might, and the fear of the Lord. Where Asa’s faithfulness ultimately faltered, Jesus remained perfectly faithful and trusted His Father completely, even to the point of death on the cross for us. That is the hope of Advent. Our peace doesn’t come from our ability to remain faithful, but in the faithfulness of our true and better King!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What differences do you notice between Asa’s response to difficulty and the character and leadership of the promised King in Isaiah 11?

  2. How does Jesus’s perfect faithfulness give you hope when your own faith falters?

  3. What competing sources of security or provision are you tempted to rely on instead of God? Where do you need to trust His faithfulness in a current difficulty, even when you can’t yet see how He will provide?

December 8 – Day 10 / King Jehoshaphat

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Behold” by Phil Wickham

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Chronicles 20; Ephesians 2:1-9

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Jehoshaphat loved God much like his father, Asa. He sent officials and Levites throughout Judah to teach the people the Law of the Lord, appointed upright judges, and destroyed the idols to Asheroth that remained in the land.

  Then a great multitude of enemies came up against him. Jehoshaphat was afraid, but instead of trusting in the strength of his army, he took his fear to the Lord. He proclaimed a fast and prayed, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” God heard his prayer and delivered Judah in a battle so glorious that the people of Judah didn’t even need to fight. The Lord fought for them!

  Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat wasn’t a perfect king. He made a marriage alliance with the infamous King Ahab of Israel and later joined forces with the wicked King Ahaziah. The man who had once looked to God alone for deliverance eventually trusted in the strength of his own kingdom and the fickle help of godless kings.

  Like Jehoshaphat, we often know that God is our only true source of help, but we still find ourselves looking elsewhere when fear takes over. We trust Him when the enemy seems too strong for us, only to turn back to our own strength when we think we can handle things ourselves.

  Advent reminds us that our hope doesn’t rest in the faithfulness of earthly kings or in our ability to trust God perfectly. Jesus is the true and better King who came to accomplish the salvation we could never achieve for ourselves. He willingly accomplished our salvation through what looked like utter weakness and defeat. When we don’t know what to do, we can fix our eyes on Him!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do today’s passages reveal about God’s role in providing salvation?

  2. How does God’s deliverance of Judah help you understand your need for Jesus?

  3. What fears are making it difficult for you to say, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you”? What would it look like to trust Him with that situation this week?

December 9 – Day 11 / King Ahab

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Hope Has A Name” by Passion

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 1 Kings 16:29-34; 1 Kings 21; Isaiah 53

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Ahab is perhaps the most infamous king in Israel’s messy history. He angered the Lord more than all the kings who came before him, committing one terrible act after another. He even married Jezebel, a wicked and pagan queen who led Israel deeper into Baal worship. Overall, Ahab’s reign was marked by idolatry, injustice, and a blatant disregard for the Lord’s commands.

  Few stories expose the wickedness of Ahab’s kingship more clearly than Naboth’s vineyard. Naboth refused to surrender his family inheritance, so Ahab went home sulking. Rather than restrain his sinful desires, he allowed Jezebel to arrange Naboth’s execution. Then Ahab took possession of Naboth’s vineyard for himself. The king who was supposed to protect his people used his power to take from them, murdering them for his own gain.

  Ahab shows us what happens when kings make themselves the center of their kingdoms. And, if we’re honest, his story exposes something in us, too. We may never use power as wickedly as Ahab did, but our hearts are constantly tempted to prioritize ourselves. We put our comfort, control, and desires above God and the good of our neighbors.

  Ahab shows us that we need a completely different kind of King, and Advent points us to Him. Isaiah tells us of the Servant who would come, not to take from His people, but to give Himself for them. He would not use His power for His own comfort or advantage. Instead, the eternal Son would humble Himself, take on flesh, and willingly lay down His life for sinners. This Advent, we turn our eyes to Him, the King we desperately need!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What differences do you notice between Ahab’s treatment of others in 1 Kings 21 and the suffering servant’s actions in Isaiah 53?

  2. How does Jesus’s willingness to suffer and give Himself for us reveal the kind of King we truly need?

  3. Where is Jesus inviting you to lay down your rights, preferences, comfort, or control for the good of someone else this Advent?

December 10 – Day 12 / King Jehu

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Noel” by Chris Tomlin & Lauren Daigle

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 9:1-10; 2 Kings 10; Matthew 25:31-46

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Jehu took Jehonadab, a prominent Kenite leader, into his chariot during the destruction of Ahab’s household. “Come with me,” Jehu told him, “and see my zeal for the Lord.” That sentence captures the essence of Jehu’s reign. He was zealous, decisive, and appointed by God to bring judgment on the house of Ahab. He destroyed Ahab’s descendants and wiped out the Baal worshippers from the land, leaving none remaining.

  But Jehu’s zeal was not the same thing as perfect obedience. He wielded a sword of judgment beyond what God had commanded, even killing King Ahaziah of Judah and many of his relatives. And though he destroyed Baal worship, he soon became ensnared by Jeroboam’s golden calves. Jehu was zealous for the Lord, but his zeal was mixed with sin and self-interest. In fact, the prophet Hosea would later announce judgment against Jehu’s house because of his excessive violence.

  Jehu reminds us that zeal alone can't make us righteous. We can be passionate about what is right and still get it wrong. We can neglect God's commands when they are inconvenient or attach our own additions when we think we know better. Like the Pharisees, we can even convince ourselves that our judgments are God's judgments. We, like Jehu, are in need of a King who judges differently.

  Matthew points us to Jesus, the King who will one day sit in perfect judgment over every person. He sees clearly, judges righteously, and knows the truth of every heart. That is an anchoring promise for us this Advent. The King who will one day return to judge all the nations and establish justice is the same King who took on flesh to ransom us!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What stands out to you about Jehu’s actions and Jesus’s description of the coming judgment?

  2. How does knowing that Jesus judges perfectly challenge your tendency to judge others by your own standards?

  3. Where are you tempted to judge others harshly or overlook someone in need? What is one way you can extend Christlike mercy to someone this Advent?

December 11 – Day 13 / King Joash (Jehoash)

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “O Come Let Us Adore Him”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 24; Daniel 7:9-14

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: After Jehu killed King Ahaziah of Judah, the kingdom plunged into turmoil. Athaliah, the evil “queen mother,” destroyed the rest of the royal family and seized the throne for herself. But unbeknownst to her, God preserved Joash (Jehoash), an heir to David’s throne, and hid him in the temple for six years. Then, in the seventh year, Jehoiada the priest brought him out of hiding. The people anointed the child and proclaimed him king, rejoicing as the rightful son of David took his place on the throne.

  Joash’s story reminds us that God is faithful to preserve His promises. Athaliah couldn’t destroy David’s royal line because God had promised that David’s house would endure! Joash began his reign well, and under the influence of Jehoiada, he repaired the temple and restored the worship of the Lord. But after Jehoiada died, Joash turned away from God. He abandoned the Lord’s house and even ordered the death of Zechariah, Jehoiada’s son, when he confronted the king’s idolatry.

  Joash was a son of David, but he was not the Son of David God's people ultimately needed. Daniel’s vision points us beyond kings like Joash. He prophesied about “one like a son of man” coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days. He was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, and unlike the kingdoms of this world, His kingdom would never pass away.

  Advent reminds us that this King has come! Joash may have been temporarily preserved from death, but Jesus was victorious over it. He is the true Son of David, the long awaited fulfillment of God's covenant promises!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What differences do you notice between Joash’s reign in 2 Chronicles 24 and the eternal reign of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:9-14?

  2. How does Jesus’s eternal reign give you hope that earthly rulers can’t provide?

  3. Where are you struggling to trust God’s promises? How can remembering Jesus’s unshakable kingdom strengthen your hope this Advent?

December 12 – Day 14 / King Azariah (Uzziah)

Light the candle of Peace. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “O Holy Night”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26; Hebrews 9

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Azariah (Uzziah) was one of Judah’s most successful kings. He strengthened the kingdom, built up its defenses, and became exceedingly powerful. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and God made him prosper. But success eventually became his downfall.

  When Azariah grew strong, he became prideful, and he defied God’s rules for worship. He entered the temple and attempted to burn incense on the altar, an act God reserved for the priests. When the priests confronted him, Azariah raged against them, but then God suddenly struck him with leprosy. From that day forward, he was forced to live in isolation, separated from the house of the Lord.

  Azariah's story reminds us that even the best earthly kings can't bring us safely into God's presence. Our sin doesn't just make us flawed; it separates us from God. We can't force our way into His presence through our good deeds, our accomplishments, or our religious devotion. Like Azariah, we need someone who can go where we can't.

  Hebrews points us to Jesus, our better King and greater High Priest. Jesus didn't enter an earthly sanctuary as Azariah presumptuously did. He entered the true heavenly sanctuary, not with the blood of animals, but with His own blood. That is the good news of Advent: the King who came to dwell among us is the same King who would give Himself for us, opening the way into God's presence. Through Christ, we have been given what Azariah could never obtain for himself: open access to the presence of our holy God!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What stands out to you about Azariah’s encounter with God’s holiness and Jesus’s work to bring us into God’s presence?

  2. How does Jesus’s sacrifice give us access to God through Him?

  3. Where are you tempted to prove your worth or rely on your own efforts? What would it look like to approach God with humility and confidence in Christ this Advent?

WEEK OF JOY

For the third week of Advent, we will be turning our attention to Joy. Life often feels like a constant pursuit of happiness as we chase good moods, momentary pleasures, or the “next big thing”. But we all know how quickly those highs can fade. We’re usually left feeling hollow, disappointed, and longing for something deeper to ease the ache in our hearts.

Thankfully, biblical joy is different. It doesn’t depend on our circumstances or change with our moods. It isn’t fragile or temporary. True joy grows quietly, even in the midst of trials, temptations, or moments of sorrow. It is the deep, unshakable assurance that Jesus is present—teaching, comforting, and carrying us through every challenge we face.

James 1:2-3 tells us: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” During Advent, we celebrate that Jesus brings us lasting joy. Through His life, death, and resurrection, we have something far better than the fleeting satisfaction the world offers. We have a joy rooted in His presence, a joy that can’t be taken away!

This joy shapes how we see ourselves and the world. In Christ, we have a new identity, full acceptance, and confidence that He loves and cares for us. As we move through this season, may we hold fast to this joy, letting it fill our hearts and guide our steps, even amidst life’s uncertainties.

December 13 – Day 15 / King Hoshea

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Hope Has Come” by Red Rocks Worship

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 15:30; 2 Kings 17:1-18; Hebrews 12:18-29

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Hoshea was the last king of Israel before its tragic fall into exile. While he wasn’t as wicked as his fathers, he still followed their pattern of rejecting the Lord. He staged a coup, assassinating Israel’s former king and seizing the throne, just as that king had done to the ruler before him.

  Hoshea gained his crown through treachery, and he lost it in the same way. When he tried to escape Assyria’s control by turning to Egypt for help, the king of Assyria discovered his betrayal, threw him into prison, and carried the people of Israel away into exile. The northern kingdom finally fell, just as God had warned through His prophets.

  Hoshea’s story reminds us that earthly kings can’t save us from the consequences of our sin. Like the rulers before him, Hoshea looked to his own schemes and the strength of earthly nations for deliverance, only to find that they couldn’t rescue him. Israel needed more than a warrior to overthrow Assyria and end their banishment. They needed a King who would lead them in righteousness and deliver them from their bondage to sin.

  During this Advent season, we look to Jesus, the true and better King who came to rescue us from a far greater exile. Throughout His life and ministry, He set His face toward the cross, never resorting to schemes or stratagems to save Himself. By His blood, He triumphed over hell and the grave, delivering us from death into eternal life. And one day, He will return in glory to dwell among His people and establish an everlasting throne—a kingdom that can never be shaken!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What reasons does 2 Kings 17 give for Israel’s exile? What promises or warnings stand out to you in Hebrews 12:18-29?

  2. How does Jesus’s death and resurrection rescue us from the greater exile of sin and death? How does the promise of His eternal kingdom give you hope as you await His return?

  3. Where are you tempted to rely on your own plans or worldly sources of security instead of trusting God? What is one way you can live more intentionally in light of Christ’s promised return this Advent?

December 14 – Day 16 / King Sennacherib

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Come and Stand Amazed” by Citizens

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Isaiah 36-37; Revelation 20

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Sennacherib of Assyria was one of Judah’s most formidable enemies. He conquered nations, razed cities, and ruled with a sword of desolation and death. As he turned his eyes to Jerusalem, he mocked the people of Judah saying, “‘Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria”. Little did he know that his arrogance would soon lead to his downfall.

  King Hezekiah received Sennacherib’s terrifying message, and he responded in an unexpected way. Rather than spiraling into despair, hatching his own plans, or mustering his waiting armies, Hezekiah took the message to the Lord. He humbled himself and prayed for God’s deliverance, knowing that he could do nothing to save himself or his people. God responded by granting Judah an epic victory, slaying 185,000 Assyrian men in one fell swoop, and devoting Sennacherib to destruction at the hands of his sons.

  Sennacherib was Hezekiah’s enemy, but we face a horrible foe of our own. Our greatest enemy isn’t an evil king or a mighty army; it’s death itself. We, too, need God to fight for us, and He did through Jesus! During this Advent season, we look to Christ, who came to be “God with us”. The child born in Bethlehem didn’t come with an earthly army, but in humility, knowing that He would lay down His life to defeat sin and death forever.

  Jesus conquered our final and greatest opponent, and He will soon cast Satan and all the enemies of God into the lake of fire forever. Now, we eagerly await His glorious return when every enemy will be put under His feet, and we will dwell with Him forever!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do these passages reveal about God’s power to deliver His people and bring His enemies to judgment?

  2. How does Jesus’s death and resurrection give you confidence that sin and death will not have the final word?

  3. Where are you seeking rescue from sin and temptation? How can the promise of Christ’s return shape the way you face that situation this Advent?

December 15 – Day 17 / King Hezekiah

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “It Came to Pass (Worthy Worthy)” by Vertical Worship

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Isaiah 38-39; Isaiah 35

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Hezekiah was one of Judah’s godliest kings. He destroyed idols, led his people back to the Lord, and trusted God when enemies threatened his kingdom. But even this faithful ruler was finite. After God delivered Judah from Assyria, Hezekiah became ill, and the prophet Isaiah warned him of his impending death. Then Hezekiah wept bitterly and prayed to the Lord, who graciously extended his life by fifteen years.

  But Hezekiah, like so many kings before him, didn’t end his reign with perfect obedience. When envoys from Babylon came to visit him, Hezekiah proudly showed them all the treasures of his kingdom. In response, Isaiah warned that the day would come when everything Hezekiah treasured would be carried away to Babylon, and even his descendants would be taken into exile. Though God had granted Hezekiah more years of life, neither he nor his kingdom could escape the consequences of the Fall.

  Hezekiah’s story reminds us that even the best of us fall short of God’s holy standard. We can be grateful for the years God gives us, yet we all have to grapple with the reality of our mortality. We can praise God for His good gifts while still being tempted to take the glory for ourselves. We are lousy rulers of our own lives and even worse saviors.

  Advent turns our eyes to Jesus, the King left His heavenly throne to save us. In Christ, we see true humility and perfect obedience on full display as He remained faithful from the manger to the cross. And one day, He will come again to lead the ransomed of the Lord to Zion, where He will be our everlasting joy!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do these passages reveal about Hezekiah’s limitations and God’s promises to restore His people?

  2. What does Hezekiah teach you about the limits of even God’s greatest earthly gifts? Why do we need a hope that extends beyond this life?

  3. What good gift are you tempted to take credit for or hold too tightly? How can you honor God with it while keeping your hope fixed on Christ this Advent?

December 16 – Day 18 / King Manasseh

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “God With Us” by All Sons & Daughters

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:10-20; 1 Peter 1:3-21

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Manasseh was unrecognizable from his father, Hezekiah. It’s hard to imagine the extent of Manasseh’s evil deeds. He filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, practiced witchcraft with mediums and necromancers, and even sacrificed one of his own sons to a pagan idol. In short, Manasseh was a hellish king.

  However, he also has one of the most shocking spiritual arcs in all of Scripture. After God denounced his sin and allowed him to be carried off to Babylon, Manasseh did the last thing you would expect from such an infamous villain: he repented! And in his genuine repentance, God heard his cry and restored his throne. Manasseh was a changed man, commanding all the people of Judah to serve the Lord from that point on.

  We may not want to admit it, but apart from Christ, we are all like Manasseh. Our waywardness is pervasive, and it wreaks havoc on God’s good creation and on our brothers and sisters. But just as God responded to Manasseh’s repentance with staggering mercy, He extends mercy to us far beyond what we deserve. In fact, while we were still dead in our sins, God had already purposed to send us a Savior.

  Jesus is the spotless Lamb, the only One pure enough to wash away the terrible stains of our sin and make us new. And His love didn’t stop at our salvation! Through Him, we have been born again to a “living hope,” and He promises us a glorious inheritance that is kept in heaven for us. Our joyful expectation this Advent isn’t for a baby born in a stable, but for a resurrected King who will soon return in power to bring us home!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do you notice about the severity of Manasseh’s sin in 2 Kings 21 and God’s response to his repentance in 2 Chronicles 33?

  2. What do these passages teach you about the depth of God’s mercy and the power of His grace to bring change, even after great sin?

  3. Is there an area where you need to repent, extend grace to someone you have written off, or trust God’s promises amid disappointment? What is one step you can take this Advent in light of the hope you have in Christ?

December 17 – Day 19 / King Josiah

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “His Name Will Be” by River Valley Worship

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 22-23; John 1:1-18

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Josiah rejected the evil ways of his grandfather, Manasseh, and took after his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, instead. He was the most righteous king Judah had seen in generations, perhaps even more devout than King David. He began seeking the Lord as a child and didn't depart from God for all the days of his life.

  He repaired the temple of the Lord, restored the Passover, purged the land of pagan worship, and led the people of Judah in renewing their covenant with God. Of all the kings we’ve read about so far, Josiah is the clearest Christ-figure, a shadow of the one true King still to come. Josiah’s reign was a beacon of hope in a world of despair, a flash of light breaking through the darkness. Yet while Josiah’s reign was unprecedented in its righteousness, it was all too temporary. Upon his untimely death, the people of Judah quickly descended into their old, idolatrous ways.

  This Advent, we magnify a far greater King than Josiah. We look to Jesus, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. His Kingship is eternal, and He did more than teach us God’s commands. He established a new covenant in His blood, opening the way for us to become children of God!

  This season can often promise more than it delivers. While we enjoy the celebrations and traditions, we know all too well that the world is dark and broken. We feel the sting of the Fall at every turn, and before long, the decorations are exchanged for a new year filled with new trials and challenges. And yet, we can be people of stunning joy because we are citizens of a good and faithful King and members of His inbreaking Kingdom. We cling to the promise that “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!”

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What similarities do you notice between Josiah’s efforts to lead God’s people back to Him and Jesus’s work described in John 1? What differences stand out?

  2. Why is it such good news that Jesus makes us “children of God”?

  3. What Christmas expectations or distractions are most likely to compete for your devotion? How can you keep Jesus at the center of your celebrations this Advent?

December 18 – Day 20 / King Jehoiachin

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Lift High (Emmanuel)” by Gateway Worship

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: 2 Kings 24:8-15; 2 Kings 25:27-30; Matthew 1

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: King Jehoiachin was an evil, foolish king. He sat on the throne for only three months before Nebuchadnezzar carried him and the royal family into exile during the second deportation to Babylon. At just 18 years old, Jehoiachin was thrown into a foreign prison, where he remained for the next 37 years.

  Soon after Jehoiachin’s capture, Judah ceased to be an independent kingdom, and the line of kings who reigned from David’s throne came to an end. This was a dark moment indeed for the people of Judah. Their long-awaited Messiah was supposed to be a “Son of David,” but now Judah would answer to a long succession of pagan empires.

  Despite the tragic implications of the exile, we can see a glimmer of hope even here. Second Kings 25 tells us that after 37 years of imprisonment, a new Babylonian king released Jehoiachin and gave him a place at his royal table for the remainder of his days. Even at their lowest point, God was still weaving a rescue plan for His people.

  Although Judah would go centuries without a king, God promised that David’s kingdom would endure forever. He predestined a “Son of David” to come with a different kind of throne, one that would never be defeated. This Advent, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the promised Son of David and the King of Kings. Our joy is not in the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms, but in Jesus Christ, whose reign will have no end!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What stands out to you about Jehoiachin’s story and the place of Jesus in Matthew’s genealogy?

  2. What does Jehoiachin’s story teach you about how God works when His promises seem impossible or delayed? How might that reshape the way you wait on Him?

  3. Where are you struggling to trust God’s timing or faithfulness? What truth about Jesus’s eternal reign can help you hold on to hope this Advent?

December 19 – Day 21 / King Nebuchadnezzar

Light the candle of Joy. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Angels We Have Heard on High”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Daniel 4; Revelation 5

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Nebuchadnezzar may have been the most powerful king in the world, but he thought far too highly of himself. After surveying his great Babylon, he boasted in his own majesty. But God had other plans for him. In an instant, God stripped Nebuchadnezzar of his sanity and reduced him to living like an animal. The once proud king learned the hard way that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”

  We, too, are often tempted to build our own little kingdoms, seeking glory for ourselves. Like Nebuchadnezzar, we can become so captivated by our accomplishments that we forget who gave us the strength to accomplish them in the first place. But Advent calls us to lift our eyes beyond ourselves and behold the King who alone is worthy. Daniel 4 only gives us a glimpse of the worship that Jesus deserves. In Revelation 5, John sees a vision where all of heaven erupts in praise, declaring that Jesus is the true Root of David!

  Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, Jesus didn't grasp at glory that didn't belong to Him. His first coming was marked by humility, as He took on flesh and entered a world that would ultimately crucify Him. But one day, the worship John witnessed in heaven will resound throughout all creation, and every knee will bow before the rightful King.

  This Advent, we can’t find joy in our own power or fleeting earthly glory. Our joy is in Jesus, the Lamb who was slain and the King who reigns forever. May we join the heavenly chorus this season, declaring with all creation: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What differences do you notice between Nebuchadnezzar’s pursuit of his own glory and the worship Jesus receives as the Lamb in Revelation 5?

  2. Why is Jesus worthy of the glory that earthly rulers often seek for themselves?

  3. Where are you most tempted to seek recognition or take credit for what God has given you? What is one way you can honor Jesus as King in that area this Advent?

WEEK OF LOVE

For our final week of Advent, we will be shifting our focus to Love. Love is more than the feelings we experience or the words we speak. It is who God is and how He reveals Himself to the world! In Jesus, God stepped into our lives in the fullest expression of His love. Beyond His words, His life shows us what love truly looks like: selfless, sacrificial, and always reaching out to others.

Jesus didn't just teach us about love; He lived it out each and every day. He cared for those who were overlooked, forgotten, or excluded. He healed, comforted, and welcomed the outcasts and the marginalized, showing us that love isn't just a nice idea. God's love is rooted in action that is tangible and transformative. This love asks for nothing in return but offers grace freely and generously.

As we move through this week, we are invited to reflect on the depth of God's love for us and to let it shape how we love others. In Jesus, we see love not as a fleeting emotion, but as a steadfast presence, guiding us to serve, care, and embrace those around us, especially those most in need!

December 20 – Day 22 / King Cyrus the Great

Light the candle of Love. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Names” by Tiffany Hudson

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Ezra 1; Ephesians 2:11-22

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: When the people of Judah were carried off to Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed, and Solomon’s temple—the place where God had promised to dwell among His people—lay in ruins. It seemed like the story of God’s people had come to a tragic end. But God hadn't forgotten His promises!

  In Ezra 1, we encounter an unexpected instrument of God’s faithfulness: Cyrus the Great, a Persian king and a Gentile. The Lord stirred Cyrus’s spirit to issue a decree allowing the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Even more remarkably, Cyrus provided resources for the work. A pagan king became an agent of Israel’s restoration! But the temple rebuilt under Cyrus wouldn't be the final answer to God’s promise to dwell with His people. Like Solomon’s temple before it, the second temple would eventually fall.

  Thankfully, God had something far better in mind. In Ephesians 2, Paul describes how Christ has done something greater than bringing exiles home to a ruined city. Through his blood, Jesus has brought those who were far off near. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, reconciling both to God through the cross. In Christ, strangers become fellow citizens, outsiders become members of the household of God, and people once divided are joined together into a holy temple.

  This is the good news of Advent. Jesus is the cornerstone of this true and better temple! The church isn’t built upon the strength of earthly kings, the permanence of human institutions, or the glory of a physical building. It's built upon Christ, the one God uses to bring us into His presence and makes us His dwelling place by the Spirit!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do you notice about the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra 1? How does Paul describe the building God is creating through Christ in Ephesians 2:19-22?

  2. What does it mean that our unity in Christ is part of God’s work of building His church? How should that shape the way you view people who are different from you?

  3. Jesus brings people from every nation into God's household. Who could you welcome, serve, or invite into the community of faith this Advent?

December 21 – Day 23 / Caesar Augustus

Light the candle of Love. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Seasons” by Hillsong Worship

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Micah 5:1-5; Luke 2:1-20

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Caesar Augustus ruled over the vast Roman Empire, commanding armies, governing nations, and exercising authority over millions of people. When he issued a decree that all the world should be registered, Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, the city of David. Augustus was likely concerned with the practical matters of governing his empire, but the emperor who sought to order his own kingdom was unknowingly serving the purposes of a far greater King.

  Centuries earlier, the prophet Micah declared that a ruler who would shepherd God’s people would come from Bethlehem. Though this small town seemed insignificant beside the grandeur of Rome, it was the place God had appointed for the birth of the promised Messiah. While Augustus sought to exercise his might, God was bringing His redemptive plan to fulfillment. Through the decree of a Gentile emperor, Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem, and Jesus, the promised Son of David, entered the world.

  Luke’s account presents a striking contrast between these two rulers. Augustus occupied the throne of the mightiest empire of his day, while Jesus was laid in a manger. Augustus exercised the authority of Rome, but Jesus came in humility. However, while the world’s attention might have been fixed on Caesar’s decree, Heaven’s announcement pointed to Jesus as “Christ, the Lord”!

  This is the wonder of Advent: Augustus sought to exercise authority over the world, but God was preparing the arrival of the King whose kingdom would never end. And this King wouldn’t conquer through the might of armies or the force of imperial commands, but through His life, death, and resurrection!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What stands out to you about the way Jesus comes into the world?

  2. Why do you think God chose a humble birthplace and ordinary circumstances for the arrival of the promised King?

  3. Where are you experiencing uncertainty or disruption this Advent? How could remembering God’s sovereignty help you respond with greater trust and peace?

December 22 – Day 24 / King Herod the Great

Light the candle of Love. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Come Adore the Humble King”

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Matthew 2; John 10:1-18

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Herod the Great was appointed by Rome to rule over all of Israel and Judea. He is best known today for his intense episodes of paranoia and cruelty. Always terrified of his political rivals, Herod went to great lengths to hold on to power including murdering his wife, three of his sons, and others in his inner circle. His violence became so infamous that Caesar Augustus once said, “I’d rather be Herod’s pig than his son.”

  When the Magi came in search of the Messiah, they went to the most obvious place to find a newborn royal: Herod’s palace. They couldn’t have anticipated that the star was pointing them toward a very different kind of King. When Herod heard their news about a new ruler born in Bethlehem, he tried to deceive them into leading him to this new rival. When his trickery failed, he responded in awful rage, killing all the male children in Bethlehem and the surrounding region who were two years old and younger.

  Herod killed innocent children in an attempt to keep his power. Jesus, the only truly innocent One, willingly laid down His life to save the lost. The King of the Universe, who could have defeated evil with a single word, chose instead to leave Heaven’s throne, suffer as we do, and take our place, bearing the Father’s wrath.

  During Advent, we’re called to listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd and respond to Him in obedience. We worship the King who laid down His life and took it up again, triumphing over sin and death forever! While the Enemy continues to act as a thief—stealing, killing, and destroying all around us—we can rejoice in the truth that Jesus has come, He has conquered, and He has given us abundant life!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do these passages reveal about the different ways Herod and Jesus respond to threats to their authority and power?

  2. What kind of life is Jesus describing in John 10? How is it different from the security, comfort, or control we often pursue?

  3. Where are you tempted to protect your own comfort, control, or reputation? How can you put another person’s good before your own this Advent?

December 23 – Day 25 / Pontius Pilate

Light the candle of Love. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “All Glory Be to Christ” by Kings Kaleidoscope

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: John 14:1-7; John 18:28-40

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, appointed to maintain order and enforce Roman authority. As governor, he held the power to sentence people to death, and he was accustomed to exercising that power to preserve Rome’s control. But when the religious leaders brought Jesus before him, accusing Him of claiming to be a king, Pilate found himself face-to-face with a very different kind of Ruler.

  During their meeting, Jesus explained that His kingdom was not of this world and that He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Pilate responded with one of the most haunting questions in all of Scripture: “What is truth?”. The One who declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” was offering Pilate the opportunity to hear His voice and recognize His kingdom. But Pilate, too concerned with political pressure and the demands of the crowd, failed to embrace the truth standing right in front of him.

  Pilate held earthly authority and the power to condemn Jesus to death, but Jesus held all authority in Heaven and on earth. Pilate’s kingdom was built on political power, human approval, and the fragile peace of Rome. Jesus’s kingdom is built on righteousness, grace, and the unshakable promises of God.

  During Advent, we remember that Jesus didn't come to offer us another perspective on truth. He came as Truth in the flesh, to show us the Father and make a way for us to be reconciled to Him. Truth isn’t something we get to define for ourselves. It’s found in the person of Jesus Christ. As we prepare our hearts for His coming, may we be people who not only seek truth but also listen to His voice, trust His Word, and walk in His ways!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What do these passages reveal about Jesus’s identity, His kingdom, and His relationship to the truth?

  2. Why is it significant that truth is revealed in the person of Jesus rather than being something we determine for ourselves?

  3. Where are you most tempted to let popular opinion or the desire for comfort shape your decisions? How can you follow Jesus faithfully this Advent?

December 24 – Day 26 / Jesus Christ, the One True King

Light the candle of Love. Then, pull up the following song, and sing along in worship:

- **Song**: “Emmanuel” by Charity Gayle

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time, then read the following Scriptures.

- **Scripture**: Revelation 21-22

Reflect on the devotional and answer the questions to dive in deeper!

- **Devotional**: The story of Scripture has always been pointing us toward Jesus, the one true King. Throughout this Advent season, we’ve explored many rulers of the Bible. We’ve seen their victories and failures, their power and weakness, their faithfulness and rebellion. Some offered glimpses of the King who was to come, while others revealed just how desperately we need Him.

  The book of Revelation gives us a breathtaking glimpse of the day when our King will make all things new. The heavens and the earth will be renewed, the holy city will descend, and God Himself will dwell with His people. There will be no more curse, no more darkness, and no more night, because the glory of God will illuminate everything. And at the center of it all is Jesus Christ, the King who reigns forever!

  This is the hope of Christmas. The baby in the manger is the Lamb on the throne. The Savior who entered our suffering will one day put an end to it. The King who laid down His life for His people will return to dwell with them forever. And unlike every earthly ruler who has ever lived, His kingdom will never pass away!

  As we celebrate Christmas Eve, may our hearts be filled with wonder at the King who came for us and hope in the King who is coming again. The world around us is still broken and suffering remains. But we don’t wait without hope! One day, we will see His face and dwell in His glorious presence forever. Until that day, may we live with our eyes fixed on Jesus, faithfully proclaiming the good news of His coming and eagerly awaiting the day when we hear Him say, “Behold, I am making all things new”!

- **Discussion Questions**:

  1. What have you learned about Jesus being the true and better King this Advent?

  2. How does the promise of God making all things new bring the story of Scripture together? What does it reveal about the ultimate purpose of Jesus’s first coming and His promised return?

  3. How should the promise of Christ’s eternal kingdom shape your priorities and expectations as you enter the coming year?

Family Activity Guide

- ☐ Escape the Christmas hustle and take a short walk or hike. Recall the journey that Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Bethlehem.
- ☐ Roll out the sleeping bags and have a slumber party by the Christmas tree. Imagine what it would be like to sleep in the hay with cows and sheep.
- ☐ Press “pause” on your busy schedule and have an impromptu Christmas music dance party.
- ☐ Make and share Christmas wish lists. Ask each other, “What are you hoping for this Christmas that can’t be wrapped?”
- ☐ Pull out some old Christmas photos and recall your favorite Christmas memories.
- ☐ Go in search of the best Christmas light displays.
- ☐ Wait for a “midnight clear” and check out the stars. Talk about what it must have been like for the wise men following a star to find Jesus.
- ☐ Skip the instant hot chocolate and make your own with steamed milk and melted chocolate chips. Enjoy this festive treat while watching a classic Christmas special.
- ☐ Clean out a toy bin, closet, or room and choose one (or more) good-quality item to donate.
- ☐ Leave bagged Christmas snacks and drinks at your doorstep for the delivery people showing up this season. Make a festive “Thank You” sign.”
- ☐ Pray that God would give each of you peace this Christmas season.
- ☐ Set a timer for two minutes and collect all the change in your house or car. Make a quick trip to a store that has a Salvation Army bell ringer and give them the change.
- ☐ Take a globe (or pull up Google Earth) and choose a country you would like to know more about. Research to see how Christmas is celebrated there.
- ☐ At breakfast, make a plan to find unexpected moments of joy in your day. That evening, share what you discovered.
- ☐ Eat a meal by candlelight and reflect on the best piece of good news you received this year.
- ☐ Grab an ornament from a local giving tree and buy an extra gift for a child or family in need.
- ☐ Share the joy. When running errands, choose to give up your spot in line to someone else. Or, gather loose grocery carts and return them to the cart corral.
- ☐ Hang candy canes, the symbol of the shepherd’s crook, on your Christmas tree. Imagine what it was like to be out in a field at night when angels appeared to deliver the news of Jesus’s birth.
- ☐ Turn off the lights and read aloud the Christmas story from Luke 1:26-2:21 by the light of the Christmas tree. Use characters from a Nativity scene to act it out.