



LET HOPE RISE:
THE SEASON OF ADVENT



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by Mitch Everingham

AN
INTRODUCTION
TO ADVENT



In each of our lives, the Christmas season is marked with a sense of anticipation.

Some of us can recall with fondness the Christmas mornings where we'd wake early, anticipating the presents that we'd find under the tree. Perhaps you're eagerly awaiting the twenty-fifth of the December because it marks the beginning of a break from work or study for the year. Maybe you're looking forward to time with your family, delicious food and an afternoon nap. And still for others, the anticipation you feel is because of the difficulty of the Christmas season, where you remember the absence of a loved one, the punctuation of the loneliness you feel, or grieving a dysfunctional family unit.

The beauty of Advent is that in both our joy and sorrow there is something—someone—who we're called to anticipate with an even greater fervour. Jesus, the long-anticipated messiah, came to bring good news of great joy—that true and lasting satisfaction is found in him—and to wipe every tear from our eyes.

Whether Christmas is the happiest time of the year or difficult period, learning to anticipate the coming of Jesus awakens the deepest longing of our souls. And the season of Advent is a gift that allows us to anticipate Jesus' arrival!

What is Advent?

Advent comes from the Latin word 'adventus', meaning 'arrival' or 'coming', and is observed in the four weeks leading up to Christmas. In 2024 it begins on Sunday December 1st and runs through until Tuesday December 24th.

The season of Advent is a way of anticipating the arrival of Jesus, the promised King. Just like Israel anticipated the arrival of a Messiah throughout the Old Testament, throughout the ages the Church has used Advent as a season of reflecting on the birth of Jesus and looking forward with anticipation to his return.

This four-week period known as Advent forms part of the church (or liturgical) calendar. The church calendar seeks to order the year around the major events of our salvation in Christ by focusing on specific theological emphases and certain spiritual practices in each season. It has historically been used by Christians as a time to prepare and posture their hearts for each 'season', which includes; Advent, Christmas & Christmastide, Epiphany, Easter & Eastertide and Ordinary Time.

The season of Advent is a time to celebrate the King who has come and will come again. It's a way of embracing Christ over consumer visions of Christmas as we anticipate his birth. It's a means of entering the story that shapes each of our stories by immersing ourselves in the biblical narrative.

What does Advent teach us?

Advent is a season marked both by anticipatory hope and watchful waiting. It embraces the reality of the now and not yet in which we live, knowing that Christ has come and will come again. In many ways, Advent is a season that stands as an invitation for us to pause for long enough that hope begins to stir in the middle of the chaos of modern life as we look back at the very first Christmas and look forward to Christ's eventual return.

Karl Barth once said, “what other time or season can or will the Church ever have but that of Advent?” In many ways he is right—our entire existence as the people of God is lived in the now and not yet, the space between the first and future coming of Christ, an extended Advent. However, learning to be people marked by anticipatory hope is not only vital for modern discipleship because of our eschatology—it’s also crucial for our witness to the world.

Our present moment is marked by instant gratification, a culture of immediacy and impatience, and a breakneck pace of life. Our chief values are often productivity and efficiency, with uncertainty, pain and waiting being seen as problems to solve not seasons to endure. The season of Advent, however, invites us to live into a deeper and truer reality that marks us as people who know how to wait with hope in a world that knows nothing about it. Tish Harrison Warren puts it like this:

Our Christian life is a long practice in waiting—waiting for God to meet us, to grow us, to save us. And, ultimately, waiting for Jesus to set all things right...Advent is training in hope because this season tells us that when things lie fallow they do not lie in waste; things that seem dormant are not dead, and times of waiting are not without meaning, purpose, or design. God is working, sometimes almost imperceptibly, deep beneath the surface of time. Waiting is part of his redemption. It is part of his gift to us. It is part of his grace.

At its core, the season of Advent is training in hope. It teaches us how to anticipate and wait for the coming of Christ with joy and patience. To look back, look around and look forward all at once.

PRACTICES
FOR
ADVENT



Practices for Advent

In the following pages, we're going to consider four practices for the season of Advent. Each of these practices are an invitation—not an obligation—to take your head, heart and hands further into story of Jesus by helping you to wait with anticipation. There is no right or wrong way to embrace the season of Advent, so take these practices as guides that might deepen your hope and stir your longing for Jesus to return!

*May the following practices be avenues of hope,
helping you await the coming of Christ with anticipation.
May they be a means to the end of encountering God's grace,
a blessing to your faith in Christ this Advent season.*

Using Advent Wreaths, Candles and Calendars

When I think of Advent, I often think of the tiny little chocolate squares hidden inside the cartoon-themed Advent calendars that I had when I was growing up. I've got vivid memories of finishing my dinner as quickly as I could on hot December evenings just so I could scoff down my next piece of chocolate—and try to eat my brother and sister's chocolate too.

Despite my obsession with the chocolate inside, the original intention behind Advent calendars was that they would be a means of counting down the days from the beginning of Advent until the birth of Jesus. When they were designed in nineteenth century Germany, they were meant to be a way of waiting with anticipatory hope, and the chocolate was a tangible sign of the coming hope that was offered in Christ. An avenue to taste and see that the Lord really is good!

It was similar with the first Advent wreaths that were made. They weren't intended to simply be nice décor or a fun Christmas activity, but instead a way of drawing our attention to the wonder of the incarnation. Originally, they had four candles placed throughout the wreath, with one being lit on the first Sunday in Advent, two on the second Sunday and so on. The reason behind this was that as each candle was lit, there would be a growing sense of anticipation that Jesus, the light of the world, was finally about to arrive. It acts as a physical reminder that the light of Christ shines in a dark, lonely and broken world—and the simple act of lighting a candle is a moment to focus afresh on who Jesus is, what he came to do, and the reason for our hope.

In the midst of the fun and festivities, gift-giving and good food, we've somehow managed to diminish the sense of anticipation for the coming of Christ that the lead up to Christmas is meant to be about.

This Advent season, let me encourage you to consider redeeming these two fun yet meaningful Christmas activities and allow them to stir hope inside of you and your household. Here are some ideas for how you can use your Advent calendar and/or your Wreath/Candle Making to be sources of hope:

Calendars

Each day as you and your family open the next flap on your Advent calendar, use this as a moment to either read a Scripture about Jesus, pray and give thanks for Jesus, or share something that you are thankful to God for that day.

Wreaths & Candles

Over the past few years, our family has practiced lighting a candle each Sunday night at the dinner table during Advent, and we've coupled this with prayer and Scripture reading. As we've read the Scriptures, we've begun to anticipate the future coming of Jesus while also remembering the wonder of his first incarnation at the same time. And when we pray, we've given thanks for the hope we have in Jesus, asked for God to push back the darkness in our world, and prayed that he would give us the light of Christ to shine to others.

As we take these simple Advent activities and turn them into practices of hope, we'll begin to not only embrace the wonder of Christmas in all of its fullness—but to become people of hope while we wait for the second coming of Christ.

Reading the Scriptures

A core way that the people of God have anticipated the coming of Jesus throughout church history is by reading the Scriptures during the season of Advent. This mirrors the anticipatory hope that Israel held as they read Old Testament prophecies and waited for the coming of the promised Messiah.

Throughout this twenty-five-day reading plan you'll journey through eleven Old Testament passages that point toward the first coming of Christ, and fourteen New Testament passages that focus on the incarnation of Jesus.

As you read, a helpful question that you might like to ask to guide your time is: What does this passage say about the significance of Jesus' arrival: then, now, and in the future?

1/12 - Isaiah 7:1-14

2/12 - Isaiah 9:1-7

3/12 - Isaiah 11:1-10

4/12 - Isaiah 30:1-26

5/12 - Isaiah 35:1-10

6/12 - Isaiah 42:1-9

7/12 - Isaiah 52:13-53:12

8/12 - Isaiah 61:1-6

9/12 - Micah 5:2-5

10/12 - Micah 7:1-7

11/12 - Zephaniah 3:14-17

12/12 - Matthew 11:2-10

13/12 - John 3:16-21

14/12 - John 1:1-9

15/12 - John 1:10-18

16/12 - Luke 1:5-25

17/12 - Luke 1:26-38

18/12 - Luke 1:39-56

19/12 - Luke 1:57-80

20/12 - Luke 2:1-21

21/12 - Luke 2:22-33

22/12 - Mark 1:1-3

23/12 - Matthew 1:1-17

24/12 - Matthew 1:18-25

25/12 - Matthew 2:1-12

Embrace Waiting

I'm not naturally a patient person. The moments of 'waiting' throughout my life are not often the ones that bring out the best in me. Perhaps it's the same for you!

Whether it's something trivial like waiting for an order to be delivered or your food to arrive at a restaurant, or more significant things like for an answer to prayers I've been praying for months or a response to an important request—waiting is not something we naturally enjoy.

In many ways, the history of Israel in the Old Testament is a story of waiting. They had to wait to enter the promised land after they waited years to leave Egypt. Then they're forced to wait for a return from exile. And after all of that, they wait in expectation of a coming Messiah—for hundreds and hundreds of years. For most of this time, they don't wait well either. Grumbling, sin, and discontentment are all direct products of their inability to wait patiently for God.

If I'm honest, I can relate to how they felt! This is part of why the season of Advent has a lot to teach us. Throughout church history, this season has been a time to embrace 'waiting', because just as Israel waited for the coming of Christ, we too await his return with longing and anticipation.

While we look back at the birth of Jesus, and can know with certainty that he will return, the waiting is still difficult at times. Many of us long for Jesus to return, and eagerly await a day when suffering, sin, and injustice are done away with. To wait well, we need to look back at the story that unfolds throughout Scripture. It helps us live out our own stories with faithfulness and rightly placed anticipation today.

In the lead up to Christmas we often sing the words from Joy to the World—'let every heart prepare him room'. One way to prepare room for Christ at this time of year is through learning to wait upon Jesus and to wait for Jesus.

This Advent season, lean into waiting. Embrace it. Enter the story that gives shape and form to each of our stories by choosing to wait. A simple practice to embrace waiting as a gift is to offer your moments of waiting to God in prayer. Whether it's waiting in line for a coffee, as you wait for your train into work, while you're trying to fall asleep, or waiting to meet a friend—we all have moments every day where we wait. And these are all an opportunity to offer ourselves to God in prayer.

In a culture of instant gratification and immediacy, we tend to reach for our phone or another distraction in the meantime—because we often don't know how to wait well. Instead, what if we offered each of these moments of waiting to God in prayer as a way of practicing our hope?

This Advent season, choose to embrace small moments of waiting as a way of remembering the One for whom you wait. Advent is a gift to remind us that this wait is not in vain, because the King who has come will come again. Why not practice waiting in watchful and hopeful prayer this Advent season?

“But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me.” | Micah 7:7

Recommended Reading

Books & Commentaries

- Advent: The Season of Hope – Tish Harrison Warren
- Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ – Fleming Rutledge
- Hidden Christmas: The Surprising Truth Behind the Birth of Christ - Tim Keller
- Christmas: The Season of Life and Light – Emily Hunter McGowin
- Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas – Nancy Guthrie

Devotions

- Good New of Great Joy: Daily Readings for Advent – John Piper
- Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional – Paul David Tripp
- Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room: Daily Family Devotions for Advent – Nancy Guthrie
- Advent for Everyone – N.T. Wright
- The Advent of the Lamb of God – Russ Ramsey
- Anticipating His Arrival: A Family Guide through Advent – Rick Brannan
- God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Family Devotions

- Family Advent Devotional: Celebrate Christ Together - Matt & Lauren Chandler
- God's Big Promises Advent Calendar and Family Devotions - Carl Laferton



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