

# Grace Church Bellingham Advent Devotional

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GRACE CHURCH BELLINGHAM ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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# Introduction

In today's busy society, the concept of Advent may be a strange one. You may think of it as the start of the formal liturgical calendar in the Western church. You may think of Advent candles, or possibly of the Advent calendar. Perhaps you think of German Lutherans, or of the Roman Catholic Church, who particularly emphasize Advent.

Advent actually comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means “coming.” It is the Latin translation of the Greek *parousia*, which is commonly thought of in terms of Christ's second coming.

So the Advent season is simply a time of reflecting on Christ's coming. Originally, Israel longed for and was awaiting the Messiah ... and so, in the fullness of time, Jesus Christ was born. We also long for and await the return of our Savior ... and this anticipation is captured in the Advent season.

For our church body, the four weeks of Advent, which precede our traditional celebration of the coming of Christ to earth, is an opportunity to ponder the depths of what Christ did, and to look forward to His return.

I'm thrilled that we can offer this little devotional, put together by Rick Brannan, which offers daily Scripture readings and a simple question-answer approach to preparing, anticipating, and rejoicing in the coming of Christ, even as we long for His coming again.

Please use this as a daily personal devotional to focus yet again on the wondrous truth of what our God has done for us in His Son. Particular encouragement is given to families, to read the readings together daily, and reinforce the truths presented here with the questions and answers.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” (Luke 2:14)

In Christ,

Dax Swanson

Pastor

Grace Church Bellingham

<http://www.gracebellingham.org>

# About this Devotional

Advent is observed each of the four Sundays before Christmas. In churches today, observance of Advent typically involves a wreath with five candles: four purple candles on the wreath itself, with a white candle in the middle of the wreath. On each of the four Sundays previous to Christmas, a candle is lit. There is also a scripture reading. There is also a reading on Christmas, with the white candle lit on that day.

This devotional uses the readings provided by the *Revised Common Lectionary*<sup>1</sup> and spreads them out across each week of Advent. This provides daily readings for the entire season of Advent.

## Basic Design

Each week of Advent focuses on a theme:

- **Week 1:** Preparation
- **Week 2:** Anticipation
- **Week 3:** Joy
- **Week 4:** Incarnation

The questions and answers each have the same ending question for each week. The idea is to consider the theme for the week in light of the reading for the day.

## Questions and Answers

Each daily reading also lists questions and answers. These questions and answers do not originate with the lectionary, they are added to this devotional to provide a starting point for family devotions during the Advent season. The questions are intended as discussion starters. The answers are not intended to be the end of the discussion, they are only provided as guidelines to help in the context of family devotions. Please use these questions and answers however you see fit in the context of your personal devotions or family devotions.

## Suggested Use

Keeping a family devotional time is difficult, and consistently preparing for that time is sometimes the most difficult part. This Advent devotional guide can help. The design and intent is for simple, short readings with simple, short questions to provoke discussion or thought.

Use of this devotional can be as simple as pulling the guide out after dinner and reading the scriptures for the day. Questions and answers are provided so that no preparation is necessary, just read the questions and discuss, referring to the answers as necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> *Revised Common Lectionary*. 2009. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. The lectionary has a three year cycle, with years labeled A, B and C. The readings used in this devotional are for “Year C.”

## **Christmas Eve and Christmas Day**

Each of the four weeks of Advent has readings for every day of the week (Sunday through Saturday). Each year, however, Christmas eve and Christmas day fall on different days. Separate readings are provided for Christmas Eve and Christmas day. The intent is not for two readings on those days. On Christmas Eve, please skip the daily reading and use the Christmas Eve reading; and please do the same for Christmas day.

In this way, this devotional can be used for any season of Advent, and perhaps this devotional can even become part of your family's Advent tradition.

## Week One: Preparation

In this first week of Advent, the goal is to set one's mind on what is coming. Reminders and prophecies of Christ's first advent are appropriate to remember, as are reminders and prophecies of his second advent. Recalling prophecies involves one's way of thinking, but one must also prepare with actions. Jesus Christ calls his own to walk in the way he did. Preparation involves getting back in step with Christ.

### Sunday: Jeremiah 33:14–16

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”

#### Questions

1. *What does the Lord promise to do?*

**Answer:** There are several items mentioned, including:

- “I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah”
- “I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David”
- “[the righteous branch] will execute justice and righteousness in the land”
- “Judah will be saved”
- “Jerusalem will dwell securely”

2. *When does he promise to do it?*

**Answer:** This will happen sometime in the future. “the days are coming” (v. 14); “in those days” (vv. 15, 16); “at that time” (v. 15). Note also the future component throughout the verses: “I will cause to spring up”, “he shall execute”, “will be saved”, “will dwell securely”, “it will be called”.

3. *How does this relate to our Advent preparation?*

**Answer:** The Lord has promised to do something, and he has promised to do it in the future. This Scripture from Jeremiah may apply to both Christ's first advent (his birth in Bethlehem) and his second advent, his coming return. We are reminded that Christ's first coming was prophesied and it happened. His second coming will surely happen too. We must prepare, and be ready.

### Monday: Psalm 25:1–5 (Part 1)

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in you I trust;  
let me not be put to shame;  
let not my enemies exult over me.  
Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;  
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all the day long.

### Questions

1. How is David “waiting for” the Lord?

**Answer:** David lists the following actions:

- “I lift up my soul”
- “In you I trust”, with the expectation that he will “not be put to shame” and that his enemies will not ultimately get the best of him

David is waiting for the Lord to guide him; he knows that waiting and preparing is better than acting without knowing God's will.

2. How does this relate to our Advent preparation?

**Answer:** Our preparation can consist of actions similar to David's. We prepare by waiting patiently in expectation. We prepare by learning more about him, by seeking his will. We prepare by knowing *why* we desire to wait and to seek his will—because he is the God of our salvation. And we prepare by remembering this, and by knowing that our patient waiting in expectation will not be done in vain.

### Tuesday: Psalm 25:6–10 (Part 2)

Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.  
Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.  
He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.  
All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

### Questions

1. What place does sin have in David's life?

**Answer:** David does not want “the sins of his youth” to have any part in his life; he wants God to forget them completely. He desires God's mercy, but he knows he is deserving of God's wrath.

2. *What place does God have in David's life?*

**Answer:** David knows that God's way is right, and that following God's path draws us closer to God through his steadfast love and faithfulness.

3. *How does this relate to our Advent preparation?*

**Answer:** As David models repentance in Psalm 25, so too we should repent of our sin. As David desires God's mercy in Psalm 25, so too we should desire God's mercy. And as David seeks the path of the Lord, so too we should seek his path to prepare for his arrival.

### Wednesday: First Thessalonians 3:9–13

For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

#### Questions

1. *What is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians?*

**Answer:** Paul prays that the needs of the Thessalonians will be met; that he (and those with him) will be able to re-connect with the Thessalonians, and that at the return of Jesus their hearts may be established as “blameless in holiness” before God.

2. *How does this relate to our Advent preparation?*

**Answer:** We too should desire for our hearts to be established as blameless in holiness at Christ's return. We should offer prayers of repentance. We should “increase and abound in love for one another and for all” (v. 12).

### Thursday: Luke 21:25-28 (Part 1)

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

#### Questions

1. *Who is coming?*

**Answer:** The “Son of Man” is coming; this refers to Jesus Christ's return.

2. *Is there any warning?*

**Answer:** Yes. This text makes clear that we will be aware of his coming before he comes. The important part about this passage is not the specific items mentioned as preceding Christ's arrival. The important part is that after some things of great magnitude occur, we have verse 27: "And *then they will see* the Son of Man ..." God will get our attention, and we will see and know the return of Christ.

3. *How does this relate to our Advent preparation?*

**Answer:** In our preparation, we should remember to look for Christ's arrival, knowing that God is faithful and will make Christ's arrival known. In the midst of anticipating his arrival, v. 28 should be a comfort: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

## Friday: Luke 21:29–33 (Part 2)

And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

### Questions

1. *What is the parable of the fig tree?*

**Answer:** When fig trees bloom, you know summer is near.

2. *What is the lesson we need to learn?*

**Answer:** In the same way that blooming fig trees herald the onset of summer, God will make clear when his kingdom is near.

3. *How does this relate to our Advent preparation?*

**Answer:** This passage (Luke 21:29–33) follows our previous reading (vv. 25–28) and offers support for the lesson learned there, that God will make clear Christ's return. The lesson is the same, as v. 31 reminds us: "when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near."

## Saturday: Luke 21:34-36 (Part 3)

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

### Questions

1. *What is the warning?*

**Answer:** The warning is to "watch yourselves" so that the day of Christ's return does not sneak

up on you. Everyone will experience it, only a portion will be ready.

2. *What is the encouragement?*

**Answer:** We are encouraged to “stay awake at all times” and to pray for strength to escape all the things that will happen, and for the strength to stand before the Son of Man.

3. *How does this relate to our Advent preparation?*

**Answer:** This passage (Luke 21:34–36) is part of the larger reading (Luke 21:25–36), exhorting those who are Christ's to be ready for his return, looking for the signs of his return that God will reveal. In our Advent preparation, we again remember that he will come back, and that we must prepare for his return.

## Week Two: Anticipation

Once reminded of Jesus Christ's promise to return, and upon being reminded once again to prepare for his arrival through repentance and prayer, we begin to anticipate his return. As Christ was prophesied to come as a babe to Bethlehem (and to die upon the cross as our sacrifice), so he is prophesied to come again, to take us home. Anticipation is continued through repentance and prayer, but also through reflecting on the sure promise of his arrival to take us home.

### Sunday: Malachi 3:1–4

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

#### Questions

1. *What is the purpose of the messenger (v. 1)?*

**Answer:** The messenger prepares the way for the arrival of the Lord.

2. *What will the Lord do when he arrives?*

**Answer:** According to v. 3, “... he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver.”

3. *How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?*

**Answer:** After preparing for Christ's return, we begin to anticipate and eagerly desire his return.

### Monday: Luke 1:68–75

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham,  
to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

## Questions

1. *This is from Zechariah's praise of God for the birth his son, John (the Baptist). What was John the Baptist's role in relation to Jesus?*

**Answer:** John the Baptist proclaimed the arrival of Jesus.

2. *What sorts of things does Zechariah praise God for?*

**Answer:** God has redeemed us, and acted to save us; he has shown us mercy and he remembers his covenant with us, and reminds us to keep our end of that covenant with him.

3. *How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?*

**Answer:** Zechariah's praise of God (vv. 68-75) sets the stage for the following section, where Luke introduces John the Baptist's purpose in "going before the Lord". Praise of God precedes the revealing of the one who will announce Christ. We too should praise God for his goodness in providing a savior for his people as part of anticipating his arrival.

## Tuesday: Luke 1:76-79

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

## Questions

1. *Who is the "child" in v. 76?*

**Answer:** The child is John the Baptist.

2. *What will the child be doing, and why?*

**Answer:** He will be "a prophet of the most high." He will "go before the Lord" with the following four purposes (though this is not an exclusive or exhaustive list):

- "to prepare [the Lord's] ways"
- "to give knowledge of salvation to [the Lord's] people"
- "to give light" to those in darkness
- "to guide our feet into the way of peace"

The primary explanation for this is found in v. 78, "because of the tender mercy of our God."

3. *How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?*

**Answer:** In Luke 1:68-79, Zechariah clarifies the role of John the Baptist as one of announcer and preparer. Some of the same things that John the Baptist did to "prepare the way of the Lord" are things that we can do to prepare for and anticipate the second advent of our Lord, Savior and

King.

### Wednesday: Philippians 1:3–7 (Part 1)

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

#### Questions

1. What is “the day of Jesus Christ” referring to?

**Answer:** This speaks of the day of Christ's second coming.

2. What does it mean to be a “partaker” of grace?

**Answer:** Here Paul is justifying his esteem of the Philippians, one reason why he “holds [them] in his heart.” As with Paul, the Philippians rely on grace for their salvation.

3. How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?

**Answer:** As we consider Christ's first advent in Bethlehem, and as we anticipate his second advent, the thought that Christ works in us through grace to save us should encourage us all the more as we look for his coming.

### Thursday: Philippians 1:8–11 (Part 2)

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

#### Questions

1. What is Paul's prayer for the Philippians?

**Answer:** Paul prays that the Philippians' love may “abound” with the end result that they may “be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” and also that they be “filled with the fruit of righteousness.”

2. How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?

**Answer:** As the day of Christ approaches, this should be our prayer too. We should desire to be blameless and pure in his sight, praising him for the grace that accomplishes this.

### Friday: Luke 3:1–2 (Part 1)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and

Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

### Questions

1. *Why are these verses, with all these time frames, names, offices and locations, important?*

**Answer:** John the Baptist's ministry preparing for Christ, and Christ's life and death, are not fiction. Information like time frames, names, dates, and locations allows for a solid anchor point in history for the events described in the gospels.

2. *How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?*

**Answer:** As the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry is not fictional, and as Christ's life, death and resurrection are not fictional, so too his second coming is not fictional. It will happen! As partakers of his grace, we should be looking forward to his arrival.

### Saturday: Luke 3:3–6 (Part 2)

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

### Questions

1. *What did John the Baptist do?*

**Answer:** He proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

2. *Why does the quotation from Isaiah 40:3–5 apply to John the Baptist and his work?*

**Answer:** John the Baptist's work and preaching pave the way for Jesus. John's message is for all to prepare, because the “salvation of God” is coming. John's work was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, and using the passage from Isaiah to confirm John's role and work puts the focus squarely on Jesus and the salvation he brings.

3. *How does this relate to our anticipation of Christ's return?*

**Answer:** In the same way as John the Baptist announced and anticipated Jesus' ministry, we should look forward to and proclaim his second coming.

## Week Three: Joy

We have prepared, and we have begun to anticipate his return. Joy is a natural part of anticipating his return as we consider what he has accomplished for us, and what he will accomplish for us. Our Savior lives! Our King is returning! And he will take us home.

### Sunday: Philippians 4:4–7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

#### Questions

1. *What is commanded in these verses?*

**Answer:** First, Paul commands the Philippians to always “rejoice in the Lord”, then he reiterates the same command. He urges the Philippians to be reasonable with everyone. He reminds that the Lord is near, and because of this to rely on God for peace, and he will provide it.

2. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** Advent reminds us that Christ came once, and will come again. This is joyous, and we should rejoice!

### Monday: Zephaniah 3:14–15 (Part 1)

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter of Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;  
he has cleared away your enemies.  
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall never again fear evil.

#### Questions

1. *Who is the “daughter of Zion”/“daughter of Jerusalem”?*

**Answer:** This is a poetic reference to Israel, the people of God.

2. *What is the reason for her rejoicing?*

**Answer:** There are three reasons given, all interrelated:

1. “The Lord has taken away the judgments against you”
2. “[The Lord] has cleared away your enemies”

3. “The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst”  
Because of these, Israel shall “never again fear evil.”

3. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** At the coming of the King of Israel, those who call him “King” have no reason to fear evil. He is in their midst, and will protect and preserve them. He has “taken away the judgments” against them. These are reasons for joy, and these remind us that our Lord will return, he has already cleansed us from our sin, and he will take us home. We will never again fear evil.

## Tuesday: Zephaniah 3:16–17 (Part 2)

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
“Fear not, O Zion;  
let not your hands grow weak.  
The Lord your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.

### Questions

1. *What does this passage say about the Lord?*

**Answer:** This passage says that:

- The Lord is mighty and will save us
- He will rejoice over us
- His love will calm and quiet us

2. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** The Lord is coming back to save us, and *he* will rejoice. This should encourage our joy at the thought of his return.

## Wednesday: Zephaniah 3:18–20 (Part 3)

I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,  
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.  
Behold, at that time I will deal  
with all your oppressors.  
And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.  
At that time I will bring you in,  
at the time when I gather you together;  
for I will make you renowned and praised

among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes,” says the Lord.

### Questions

1. *What sorts of things will the Lord do upon his return?*

**Answer:** Those who oppress will be dealt with. Those who are lame will be healed. Those who are the Lord's will be “renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth.”

2. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** Not only is the Lord coming back, he will establish his kingdom, and restore his people.

### Thursday: Luke 3:7–18 (Part 1)

He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

### Questions

1. *What sorts of things was John the Baptist telling the crowds that came to see him and be baptized by him?*

**Answer:** John urges them to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” Further, he tells them to share what they have; he tells the tax collectors to only collect what they are authorized to do, and exhorts soldiers to be content with their wages.

2. *Verse 15 starts, “As the people were in expectation ...” Are you in expectation?*

**Answer:** This is a question to provoke thought and reflection, not one to necessarily be answered audibly.

3. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** Advent reminds us that our expectation of Christ's return is, with every passing day,

closer to reality.

## Friday: Luke 3:7–18 (Part 2)

[See above for reading]

### Questions

1. *How did John the Baptist respond to those wondering if he was the Christ (the Messiah)?*

**Answer:** John makes it plain that the Christ is greater than he is.

2. *What will the Christ do when he comes?*

**Answer:** The Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He will also gather up his own (the wheat) and chaff he will “burn with unquenchable fire.”

3. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** Christ will return, will gather us up, and make us his. This is cause for rejoicing!

## Saturday: Isaiah 12:2–6

“Behold, God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and will not be afraid;  
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation.”

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day:

“Give thanks to the Lord,  
call upon his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples,  
proclaim that his name is exalted.  
“Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be made known in all the earth.  
Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

### Questions

1. *How is God portrayed?*

**Answer:** God is salvation, and he is worthy of all trust. Note how verse 2 starts and ends proclaiming God as “my salvation.” This emphasizes the concept.

2. *What is the response to God?*

**Answer:** Thanks is given to God, and his work and name are proclaimed. Praises are sung to him.

3. *How does this relate to joy during the Advent season?*

**Answer:** As Advent reminds us of the imminence of Christ's return, our response to his return should be the same: We should thank God, we should proclaim his work and name, and we should sing praises to him; all of this should be done with joy.

## Week Four: Incarnation

As Christmas Day approaches, thoughts of Jesus Christ's incarnation (literally, his “en-fleshment”) naturally rise to the forefront of our thoughts. This is a mysterious thing that we cannot fully comprehend: How the Son of the living God took on flesh to be like us, to save us, is beyond us. Yet though we do not understand how it happened, we can, like the author of Hebrews, appreciate it greatly:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:14–18)

### Sunday: Luke 1:39–45 (Part 1)

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

### Questions

1. *What does the word “incarnation” mean?*

**Answer:** “Incarnate” means to be made into flesh. One Bible dictionary puts it this way: “Incarnation” means literally “en-fleshment” or, slightly more fully, “embodiment in flesh.”<sup>2</sup>

2. *How does this passage show that Jesus Christ was incarnate?*

**Answer:** Mary is referred to as “mother of my Lord.” In Luke's account, this happens after the angel has visited Mary to tell her about Jesus.

3. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*

**Answer:** The baby in Elizabeth's womb (who was John the Baptist) jumped at Mary's presence. Elizabeth gets filled with the Holy Spirit and pronounces a blessing on Mary, the mother of Jesus. The incarnation was precious to Elizabeth; we should treasure it too.

### Monday: Luke 1:46–55 (Part 2)

And Mary said,

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2 David Noel Freedman, vol. 3, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 397.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
     and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
     For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
     and holy is his name.  
 And his mercy is for those who fear him  
     from generation to generation.  
 He has shown strength with his arm;  
     he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
     and exalted those of humble estate;  
 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
     and the rich he has sent away empty.  
 He has helped his servant Israel,  
     in remembrance of his mercy,  
 as he spoke to our fathers,  
     to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

### Questions

1. *This is Mary's response to Elizabeth's blessing. It is also known as the 'Magnificat'. What is Mary's response?*  
**Answer:** “My soul magnifies the Lord.” Mary's response is to exalt the Lord, to praise him.
2. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*  
**Answer:** Mary notes that future generations will call her “blessed” as a result of her role in the incarnation of Christ.

### Tuesday: Micah 5:2–5a

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
     who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
 from you shall come forth for me  
     one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
 whose coming forth is from of old,  
     from ancient days.  
 Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
     when she who is in labor has given birth;  
 then the rest of his brothers shall return  
     to the people of Israel.  
 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
     in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
 And they shall dwell secure,  
     for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

And he shall be their peace.

### Questions

1. *What in this passage has to do with the incarnation?*

**Answer:** This passage speaks of “when she who is in labor has given birth.” Here we know that the one that Israel is waiting for is prophesied to be born of a woman. Matthew uses part of this prophecy (see Matthew 2:6) applied to Jesus, so the rest must apply too.

2. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*

**Answer:** The one who will be born of a woman will come to be ruler, and to set his people free. He will “shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,” and they will dwell securely. And he shall be their peace

### Wednesday: Hebrews 10:5–10

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

### Questions

1. *What was the effect of sacrifices and offerings?*

**Answer:** While useful for the purposes for which God established them, sacrifices and offerings made according to the law ultimately were of no pleasure to God. To permanently achieve their purpose (appeasement of God’s wrath due to our sin), something else had to be done.

2. *What is the effect of the “offering of the body of Jesus Christ”?*

**Answer:** The offering of Jesus Christ is effective “once for all.” It achieves what sacrifices and offerings under the law could not accomplish: our sanctification.

3. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*

**Answer:** Note that it is “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” that sanctification occurs. The human body of Jesus Christ; the fact that he was fully human (and, of course, fully God) plays a necessary role in our sanctification. Without the human body and nature of Christ, this would not have been accomplished. The incarnation is, indeed, precious.

## Thursday: Titus 2:11–14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

### Questions

1. *In this passage, “the grace of God” is personified. He appears, and he brings salvation. Who is it?*

**Answer:** “The grace of God” is the one who brings the grace, the one who enables us to receive grace: Jesus Christ.

2. *What does he (“the grace of God”) “train” us to do?*

**Answer:** There are three items mentioned:

- To renounce ungodliness and worldly passions
- To live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age
- To anticipate the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

3. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*

**Answer:** Because of the incarnation, we are redeemed, and we are “his own possession.”

## Friday: Titus 3:4–7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

### Questions

1. *Who is “the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior”?*

**Answer:** The same as “the grace of God who appeared” in Titus 2:11, Jesus Christ.

2. *What did he (“the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior”) do and why did he do it?*

**Answer:** He saved us. And he did it not because of anything righteous that we did, but because of his mercy. (See also Eph 2:6–8)

3. *How did he do it?*

**Answer:** He saved us “by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” whom we have because of Jesus Christ. Because of this we are justified, and we have the sure hope of eternal life.

4. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*

**Answer:** Jesus Christ, God incarnate, is our savior. Without him, we have no hope of eternal life. With him, we are “heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” This is precious.

## Saturday: Psalm 96

Oh sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth!  
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples!  
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
he is to be feared above all gods.  
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,  
but the Lord made the heavens.  
Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.  
Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!  
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts!  
Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth!  
Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!  
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity."  
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;  
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
let the field exult, and everything in it!  
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy  
before the Lord, for he comes,  
for he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness,  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

### Questions

1. *How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?*

**Answer:** Because he is the Lord, and he has saved us. We are his people. The greatness of his work in saving us, in providing Jesus Christ as our atoning sacrifice, is reason for praise.

# Readings for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

## Christmas Eve: Isaiah 9:2–7

The people who walked in darkness  
    have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
    on them has light shined.  
You have multiplied the nation;  
    you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
    as with joy at the harvest,  
    as they are glad when they divide the spoil.  
For the yoke of his burden,  
    and the staff for his shoulder,  
    the rod of his oppressor,  
    you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
    and every garment rolled in blood  
    will be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For to us a child is born,  
    to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
    and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace  
    there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
    to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
    from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

### Questions

1. Usually Isaiah 9:6–9 is the portion of this passage read at Christmas. What do vv. 2–5 add to our understanding of this whole passage?

**Answer:** Verse 2 uses a contrast between darkness and light to introduce the light. Verse 3 introduces the joy this light brings. Verses 4 and 5 recall trouble, and cast the light as the solution to the trouble. Into this, verse 6 explains the light, the child that is to come.

2. How does this passage show that the incarnation is precious to remember during Advent?

**Answer:** The one who brings the light; the one who brings the joy; the one who is the solution to present troubles; this one comes born of a woman. The one who saves us was born of a woman, and was human himself. During Advent we remember his first arrival, and look forward to his second coming.

## Christmas Day: Luke 2:1–20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

### Questions

1. *Jesus Christ, the Messiah, our Savior, was born into the world as a baby. What was the reaction of those who witnessed this event?*

**Answer:** The angel who appeared to the shepherds announcing the birth was quickly joined by a multitude that praised God in a magnificent way. Mary “treasured up all these things in her heart;” that is, the story of the shepherds and the angels' praise. And the shepherds reacted much the same as the angels, “glorifying and praising God” because what they had heard and seen was as it had been told to them.

2. *What should our reaction to the birth of our Savior be this Christmas day?*

**Answer:** The shepherds are our model. They heard, they saw, and they glorified and praised God. As we remember his birth (and and we anticipate his second coming), let us praise and glorify God for his magnificent salvation!