



# ADVENT

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*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. **1 PETER 1:8-13***

The King is coming. Jesus Christ has come and will come again. This is the hope of the Church whom He purchased with His blood. Jesus' coming is the eager expectation and desire of His people. It is our joy because He is our treasure and greatest good. This is the theme of "Advent," formed from a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arrival." It's the traditional celebration of the first advent of Jesus in humility and the anxious awaiting of His second advent in glory. The season is a time for remembering and rejoicing, watching and waiting.

## **HISTORY AND TRADITIONS**

The Advent season officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues until Christmas Eve or Day. There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on tradition and background. Many people use an Advent calendar, typically made up of 24 "windows" containing Scriptures, stories, poems or gifts, to count down the days until Christmas. As each window is opened and the final day draws closer, expectation increases. This reminds us of the hopeful yet anxious waiting God's people experienced as they longed for the promised Savior to come.

Another popular tradition is marking the progression of the season through an Advent wreath made up of five candles. This symbol is borrowed from the emphasis throughout Scripture of Jesus Christ being the Light of the World (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9; 8:12). Each week a new candle is lit in anticipation of Christmas Eve. The last candle, called the Christ Candle, is lit on Christmas Eve to represent Jesus' first advent. Through this theme of ever-increasing light penetrating the darkness, we see a picture of the gospel.

Regardless of the tradition, Advent is a significant time in the life of the church. It's an opportunity for believers to remember God's promise to send One who would overcome sin and death forever. God promised a Savior, and He kept that promise perfectly.

## **USING THE GUIDE**

This guide contains five weeks of material, with both a study to complete on your own as well as a plan to help families talk about the Advent narrative together. The family portions are designed to work for families of all shapes and sizes and do not require extensive preparation. Either portion of the guide can also be used to facilitate discussion within your Home Group or with friends, roommates or other community.

The Advent study walks through the narrative of Jesus' birth. It begins in the Garden with God's promise of a Savior and ends with an eager anticipation of Jesus' promised return. In the middle, God shows His unmistakable faithfulness in sending the promised Rescuer. We see His love for the lowly and outcast as He proclaims the news of His Son to the shepherds. We marvel at His heart to see all nations come and worship His Son through the Magi's journey.

Even if you know the Advent narrative well, don't rush past what God has for you in this season. For many, this may be the first time to consider all that God is saying through the birth of His Son. For others, it will be an opportunity to rediscover the way God intimately works in the details of life for His glory and the good of man. For all of us, may this season be one marked by hope, expectation, remembrance and worship. The King has come and is coming! There is much to celebrate.

## **A NOTE FOR FAMILIES**

Advent is an opportunity to pause and reflect on the birth of Jesus. But especially for families, this time of year can be filled to the brim with activities and obligations. Before the calendar begins to overflow, set aside a few minutes to consider what you want this season to be for your family. Then make a plan so that a time intended to remember and celebrate doesn't get swallowed up by lesser things.

To help toward that end, we have provided a family portion each week that will help you create intentional time to talk about Jesus. If you choose to use the Advent wreath as the guide suggests, put it in a special, visible place in the house to serve as a reminder of Jesus' coming. There is also a song each week for your family to sing or listen to together. These songs are available on our Advent playlist posted to Spotify ([villagechurchtx](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/villagechurchtx)).

We wrote the family portions of the guide with preschool and elementary-aged children in mind. If you have older children, consider having each person work through the "Personal Study" section in place of reading the family commentary, and then come together to talk about what you learned.

## **PLAYLISTS AND PINTEREST**

In both the “Personal Study” and “Family Discipleship Time” sections, you’ll find suggested songs to listen to every week. These songs are available on our Advent playlist posted to Spotify ([villagechurchtx](#)). We hope and pray these songs encourage you and your family throughout the season.

There are many suggested activities in the “With Your Family” sections of the Advent guide. Our hope is not to give you a long list of things to “do,” but rather to provide options to help you look to Jesus in creative ways this season. We have created a Pinterest board ([pinterest.com/villagechurchtx](#)) where you can find ideas, examples and instructions for many of these activities.

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Additional Activities for Families During the Advent Season

**Appendix B:** Recommended Resources

**Appendix C:** Additional Scriptures for Study and Reflection



# **Week 1**

*The Promise of a Savior*

NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 3

# WEEK 1

- P E R S O N A L S T U D Y -

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.*

**GENESIS 3:15**

*But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

*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.*

**ISAIAH 9:1-7**

**Think of a time when you were in trouble and needed to be rescued.  
How did you feel in that situation? Whom did you look to for help?**

## ***Advent in the Beginning***

Many of us grew up with the story of Advent beginning in a stable. But, the story begins in a Garden.

When God created the world, all things were just as they should be. Creation functioned in perfect order according to God's beautiful design. Man walked in unbroken relationship with God, fully known and unafraid. But in an instant, all that changed as Adam and Eve disobeyed God's good instruction. They took of the fruit and ate, and sin entered the world. Fellowship broken. Peace shattered. Creation thrown into chaos. Darkness, depravity, fear, shame and selfishness flooded the human heart, separating man from God. The situation was dire.

But right then, amid the darkness, God spoke a word of hope: a Savior would come, born of a woman, to defeat the enemy and deliver God's people.

Scholars refer to Genesis 3:15 as the *proto euangelion* or the "first gospel." From the first moment of our need for rescue, God's promise was there. Before He addressed Adam and Eve, God turned to the serpent and announced that sin would not have the final say and that the schemes of the enemy would not prevail.

## ***Shadows, Hints and Whispers of His Coming***

Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to His people about this promise and gave them things to watch for in order to recognize the Savior's coming. God revealed that the Messiah would be born in the line of David (Isa. 9:6-7), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and in the town of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). He would be a Man of Sorrows—crushed, despised and rejected—justifying many through what He suffered (Isa. 53). The promised Deliverer would be a light overcoming darkness (Isa. 9:2), a Preacher of Good News to the poor (Isa. 61) and One walking in the power of the Spirit (Isa. 42:1). There were hints and shadows of Him everywhere.

God also reminded His people not to lose heart as they waited for the Savior to come. It's important to remember that God did not fulfill His promise right away. His people waited a long time. They spoke of the promised Rescuer from generation to generation, enduring cycles of war, rebellion, captivity and restoration. They watched and waited—anxiously, expectantly—for God's faithfulness.

We can all identify with feeling hopeless, helpless and in desperate need of rescue, especially when it comes to the weight of sin. Heavy and inescapable, we know its effects with every breath—both our own sin and that of others. Our world is full of evidence that something is wrong and needs to be made right. The reason we celebrate Advent is because the story of the Garden doesn't end with man's rebellion—but instead his redemption.



## ***Reflection***

Consider the way God used Moses to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 12-14). Was there any way for the Israelites to escape their slavery apart from God's provision and power? How is sin an even harsher, more oppressive master than Pharaoh? What is our only hope of deliverance?

Think about Israel's long wait for the promised Savior to come. How do you think God's people fought against doubt, discouragement and the temptation to believe God forgot them?

God often gives us seasons of waiting to sift and strengthen our faith. If you are in a season of waiting, what might the Lord be teaching you?

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

## ***Response***

What is one hope you have for yourself, your family or your community as you begin the Advent season? How will you make that a reality?

Pray for yourself and those around you, asking God to open your eyes and heart to what He has for you this Advent season.

## ***Songs of the Season***

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel  
Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*

# WEEK 1

- F A M I L Y   D I S C I P L E S H I P   T I M E -

***Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's promise to rescue His children from sin. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.***

## ***Lighting of the Advent Candle***

Have one member of the family light the first candle.

## ***Scripture Reading***

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

*Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: "It will not always be so! I will come to rescue you! And when I do, I'm going to do battle against the snake. I'll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I'm coming back for you!" And he would. One day, God himself would come.*

**THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

*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. **ISAIAH 9:6***

## ***Reflection***

Briefly talk about what it means to be rescued from something. When might you need to be saved from danger? Whom would you call upon to rescue you? For example, if there were a fire, whom would you call to save you? What are rescuers typically like?

*Have an adult read the commentary below.*

In the very beginning, God created a perfect world. There was no sin, pain, sickness, death or sadness. God created Adam and Eve to live in His perfect world with joy and peace. But Adam and Eve sinned. They disobeyed God. When they sinned, God's perfect world broke.

There was a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. Because God is perfect, He cannot be near sin. So Adam and Eve were separated from God. The punishment for their sin would also be placed on all humans who were born after Adam and Eve.

*Ask: Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, each of us needs to be rescued from something. What do we need rescue from?*

But before Adam and Eve left God's perfect Garden, God made a promise. God promised to send a Rescuer, someone to save Adam, Eve and mankind from the punishment of sin. He promised to send Jesus!

God did not send Jesus to rescue His people right away. God waited thousands of years to send the Rescuer. During that time, God's people faced many hard things. While they waited, God gave them hints and clues about how Jesus would come, what He would do and what He would be like. These hints, written in Scriptures by prophets, would help God's people wait. The verse from Isaiah that we read together after lighting the Advent candle was written while God's people waited those thousands of years for the Savior.

During that time, God made other promises to His children and kept those promises. Each time God made and kept a promise, it helped His children trust that He would be faithful to His promise to send Jesus to rescue them from their sins.

*Ask: What do you think it felt like for God's people to wait for the promised Rescuer to come?*

Some days, God's children waited patiently. Some days, they waited with tears and frustration. Some days, they wondered if God had forgotten His promise. But God continued to whisper it over and over again as His children waited. And one day, when no one was expecting it, Jesus would come.

God shows us many things about what's He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is the Deliverer, that He rescues His children, in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

## **Prayer**

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for His goodness and mercy in sending Jesus to rescue us from our sins.

## **Song**

As a family, sing or listen to “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's Strength and Consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

## **Family Activity**

Parents, make plans for a fun Christmas activity next week that you know your children will love. Perhaps it's seeing a Christmas play or movie, decorating cookies together or seeing Christmas lights.

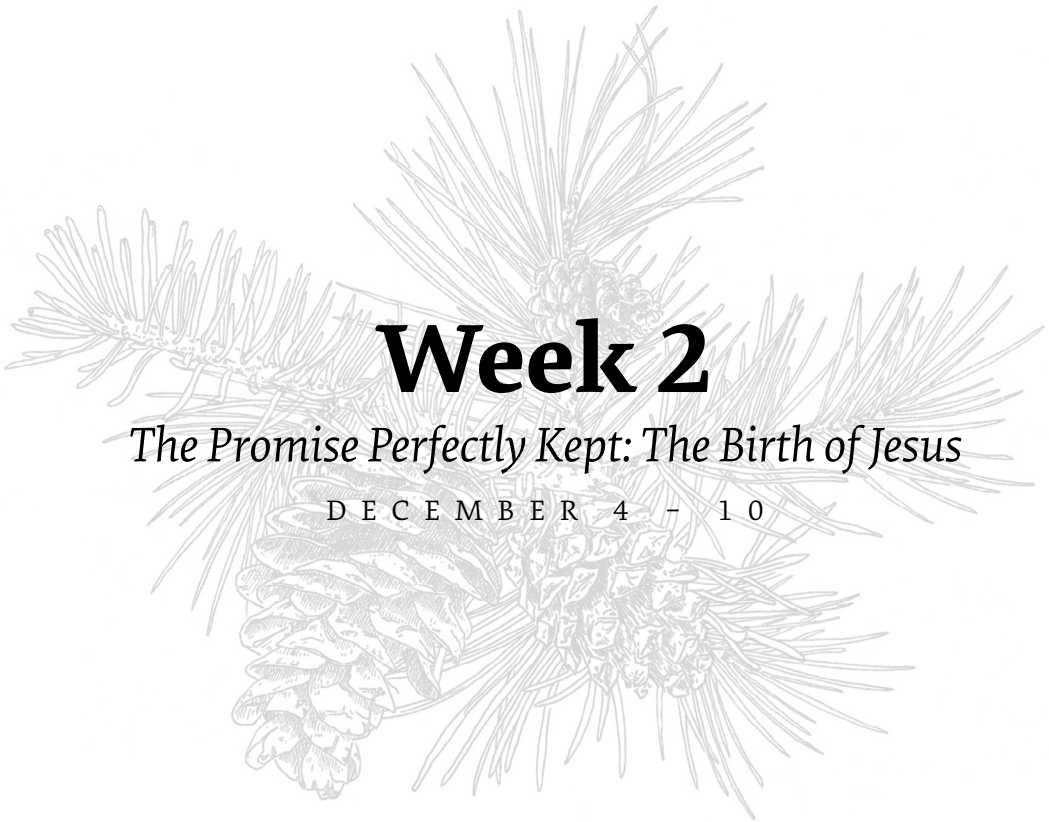
At the end of your family Advent time, promise your kids that you are going to do something special together to celebrate Advent—something they will love—but don't tell them what or when. As the days go by, remind them of your promise and give them hints as to what it might be. Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of God's promise to send a Rescuer and the anticipation God's people felt as they waited.

## ***Additional Activities***

*(examples and instructions can be found on The Village's Pinterest boards)*

Create an Advent wreath to use throughout the Advent season.

Create a nativity scene to use throughout the Advent season. If you would like to make this activity last the entire season, consider creating just the stable, animals and Mary and Joseph this week.



# **Week 2**

*The Promise Perfectly Kept: The Birth of Jesus*

DECEMBER 4 - 10

# WEEK 2

- P E R S O N A L S T U D Y -

*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.*

**MICAH 5:2**

*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.*

**LUKE 2:1-7**

**Describe a time when you looked forward to an event for a long time.**

**What emotions did you feel as you waited?**

**How did you feel when the wait was finally over?**

## ***He Came Just as He Said He Would***

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the promised Savior, telling the people how to recognize His coming and reminding them that God had not forgotten. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the Son of a virgin, a King to rule according to the lineage of David, ushering in an era of unprecedented peace. Israel watched and waited, filled with longing and expectation for this promised Deliverer.

And then, on a night unassuming and normal, God came—just as He said He would. A young woman named Mary, who was with child, journeyed alongside Joseph, her betrothed, from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be counted for the census according to Caesar's decree. The couple entered the sleepy Judean town, filled to the brim with the descendants of David, and took refuge in the only place available: a stable. And when the fullness of time had come, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. He was wrapped in cloths, laid in a manger and given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins. And just like that, a whisper in the Bethlehem night, a Child was born, a Son was given.

Four hundred and fifty years of silence had passed since the final words of the prophets. At long last, a cry of deliverance was heard again, uttered from the lips of the Word Made Flesh. This newborn's cry pierced the midnight sky like a trumpet heralding sin's demise and the defeat of death forever for all who would believe. The Ancient of Days stepped into time and wrapped Himself in the frailty of human skin. He came, full of pity, compassion and power, to rescue those lost in darkness and carry them into the kingdom of everlasting light. He came, just as He said He would, to do what we never could.

With hindsight, we see in Jesus the fulfillment of all that the prophets spoke concerning the Messiah. We understand that our Lord has done just what He said He would do in exactly the right way, at exactly the right time. We also see that God is full of compassion. He saw the desperate need of His people. He cared and acted by sending His only Son to save them.

May our hearts be encouraged! Let Advent be a time to reflect on God's good attributes and His faithfulness to do exactly what He said He would.



## **Reflection**

Consider the prophecies from Isaiah 9:1-7 and Micah 5:2. How do you see these fulfilled in Jesus' birth?

Think about the circumstances that led Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. What do they show you about God's sovereignty?

The Old Testament contains many prophecies pointing not just to Jesus' birth but also to the salvation He would accomplish. Look up the passages below and see how they illustrate this truth.

### **OT Prophecy**

Genesis 3:15  
Isaiah 9:2  
Isaiah 53:10-11  
Isaiah 53:4  
Isaiah 61:1-4

### **NT Fulfillment**

Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 4:4-7; Colossians 2:13-15  
Matthew 4:12-17; John 1:4-5; 12:46  
Romans 5:1-2  
Matthew 8:14-17  
Luke 4:16-21

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

## **Response**

As you make your list of people to buy gifts for, include someone who would never expect to receive a gift from you. Think of the delight you feel in blessing them and consider the love in God's heart as He sent His Son to die for sinners.

In prayer, thank God for His goodness in sending a Savior. Confess places where your confidence in His faithfulness is weak and ask Him for increased trust, belief and hope.

## **Songs of the Season**

*O Holy Night*  
*Silent Night*  
*God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*

# WEEK 2

- F A M I L Y   D I S C I P L E S H I P   T I M E -

***Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about God's mercy in sending a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.***

## ***Lighting of the Advent Candle***

Have one member of the family light last week's candle and a second candle.

## ***Scripture Reading***

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

*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. **LUKE 2:3-7***

*And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his wonderful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby Son.*

**THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

## ***Reflection***

*Have an adult read the commentary below.*

Do you remember the promise we talked about last week? God's promise to send a Rescuer? His promise to send Jesus? Well, Jesus came, just like God said He would!

After thousands of years of waiting, on an ordinary night, Jesus came. God gave His people hints and clues about how Jesus would come. He told them that Jesus would come from Bethlehem, be a Ruler and bring peace. Many expected a soldier; some expected a politician. No one

expected a baby. But that's how Jesus came.

*Ask: If you had been an Israelite, how would you have expected the promised Savior to come?*

Mary and Joseph lived in a town called Nazareth. One day, the king gave an order that everyone was to go back to their hometown to be counted for something called a census. Mary and Joseph traveled a long way to the town of Bethlehem, where Joseph's family was from. When they got to Bethlehem, the town was full of other travelers, and there was nowhere for Mary and Joseph to stay. So they found a stable to sleep in. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby, and Jesus, the Savior, was born.

*Ask: How do you think Joseph and Mary felt when they finally got to Bethlehem and realized they had nowhere to stay? Do you think God knew that they felt this way?*

Jesus, the King of heaven, left His perfect home to be born a baby to a young man and woman. He became fragile and helpless. His room that night was a stable—dirty, smelly and full of noisy animals. His bed was not kingly and luxurious; it was a feed box that animals ate out of. Mary had to wipe old, rotten food out of the manger and cover it with poky straw before she laid her tiny baby in it.

*Ask: Is a stable the place you would expect the Savior to be born? Why do you think God decided for His one and only Son to be born there?*

But everything that happened that night was exactly what God had planned and promised. Jesus came, just like God said He would. God saw that we needed to be rescued from sin. He cared about us in our need, and He acted. He sent Jesus.

The events of that night, in that stable in the little town of Bethlehem, would change the world forever.

God shows us many things about what's He's like in the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is compassionate—that He sees, cares and acts when His children are in need—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

## **Prayer**

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending Jesus to be born as a baby who would save us from our sins.

## **Song**

As a family, sing or listen to “Away in a Manger.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.  
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.*

## **Family Activity**

This week, keep the promise you made to your family during last week’s family Advent time. Talk about how you fulfilled the hints and clues you gave them. Discuss the experience of waiting: What was it like to wait? What was it like to finally experience what you had been waiting and hoping for? Remember together God’s faithfulness in sending a Savior. It happened just as He said it would.

## **Additional Activities**

*(examples and instructions can be found on The Village’s Pinterest boards)*

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the baby Jesus piece and add it to the set.

Create a set of ornaments that show the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus’ birth and their fulfillments in the New Testament.

Create a nativity scene out of Legos.

Use a sock and stuffing to create a baby Jesus doll, wrapped in fabric scraps. Make a manger for the doll out of a paper sack. Let your preschooler care for baby Jesus and have him/her use it to retell Jesus’ birth story throughout the week.



# **Week 3**

*Tell of His Coming: The Shepherds and Angels*

DECEMBER 11 - 17

# WEEK 3

## - P E R S O N A L S T U D Y -

*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 great 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.*

**LUKE 2:8-20**

*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

**ROMANS 10:14-15**

**Who is the first person you tell when you hear or experience something good?**

## ***Tell of His Coming***

We love hearing good news, especially when we're the first to know. There's a big difference between getting a phone call from your best friend about their pregnancy, engagement or new job and finding out about it on Facebook. We cherish being invited to participate in the lives of the people we love instead of simply being spectators.

Today, the ability to share exciting news with others is quick and easy. With one tweet, post, hashtag or group text, we can communicate with the masses. But things were obviously very different in the time Jesus was born. When something important happened, such as the birth of a child, heralds often spread that news. Families welcoming new babies, if they had the means to do so, would hire someone to go throughout the community and announce their happy news. Mary and Joseph, of humble means, did not have the ability to do this. But God Himself provided a company of heavenly heralds to proclaim the birth of His one and only Son.

Imagine the scene: shepherds on the midnight watch, ears and eyes open for signs of danger, sheep bleating in the background. And then, out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord bursts onto the scene with the news of the Savior's birth. It is amazing that God chose this group of men as the first to hear the good news. In the time of Jesus' birth, people regarded shepherds as liars and thieves. Because they were nomadic, moving from place to place to graze their flocks, people didn't readily trust them. Yet it was to men such as this that God announced the Messiah's coming. He told them first! Not royalty, not the religious leaders of the day, but shepherds—lowly and insignificant. He invited them into His story and then mobilized them as the very first evangelists.

As soon as they heard news of Jesus' birth, the shepherds felt compelled to act. They went with haste, leaving their flocks behind, to find Mary, Joseph and the Savior Child lying in a manger. And once they beheld the One through whom salvation would come, they spread the word of all that had taken place.

We are like these men—unlikely recipients of an unbelievable reality. Just as God called the shepherds to witness and testify to Christ's birth, so we are called to herald the saving work of His death and resurrection. As believers, we have been invited into His story, sent out as heralds of both Jesus' first coming and His second. As we consider the shepherds, let us respond as they did to this good news of great joy—with amazement, belief and action.

## ***Reflection***

How did you first hear the gospel? Who told you, and how did you respond?

God does not need messengers to communicate His gospel. Why do you think He charged the shepherds with sharing the good news of Jesus' birth? Why do you think He charges us with sharing the good news of salvation?

Did sharing the news of Jesus' birth feel like a burden or a joy to the shepherds? Why? How do you feel about sharing the gospel? What might help you consistently view it as a joyful calling?

What fears keep you from sharing the news that Jesus has come to save sinners? Look up Colossians 1:3-6. How might the assurance in this passage increase your boldness?

Through the proclamation of the angels, God showed His greatness and worth to the shepherds. When do you remember first sensing the beauty of God's glory?

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

### ***Response***

Write a letter to someone who was instrumental in your coming to faith. Whether or not you can actually send them that letter, communicate how the Lord used them to change your heart and life.

In prayer, praise God for loving the weak, despised and lowly and showing them His glory. Thank Him for the person or means He used to share the gospel with you, and ask Him for the boldness and faith to do the same.

### ***Songs of the Season***

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*  
*Angels We Have Heard on High*



# WEEK 3

- F A M I L Y D I S C I P L E S H I P T I M E -

***Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how God showed His glory to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.***

## ***Lighting of the Advent Candle***

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first two weeks and a third candle.

## ***Scripture Reading***

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

*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 great 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." **LUKE 2:8-12***

*Behind the angel they saw a strange glowing cloud—except it wasn't a cloud, it was angels... troops and troops of angels, armed with light! And they were singing a beautiful song: "Glory to God! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays!" **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE***

*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. **LUKE 2:15-17***

## **Reflection**

*Have an adult read the commentary below.*

As Mary and Joseph held their newborn Son during those late hours of the night, God began spreading the wonderful news of Jesus' birth. And He began with an unusual group of people.

*Ask: Whom would you expect God to tell first that the promised Rescuer had come?*

Kings, queens and religious leaders were not the first people to hear about the birth of Jesus. Instead, God told the most unimportant of people His good news first. Back in those days, people looked down on shepherds and even hated them. Most people considered them criminals, thieves and liars. Yet these were the first people to hear that the Rescuer had come. And the way they heard that good news was nothing short of amazing.

While the shepherds watched their sheep in a field outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared. The Bible tells us that the shepherds were filled with great fear. This angel that appeared to them was no baby with wings and a harp sitting on a cloud, like some stories might describe. No, this angel was a warrior of the Lord. And he shone with the glory of God. The bright radiance of heaven itself interrupted the deep darkness of the night. It was as if God peeled back the curtain of heaven and gave the shepherds a small glimpse of Himself.

*Ask: How do you think the shepherds reacted when they saw the angel of the Lord?*

The angel told the shepherds not to be afraid. God did what He had promised—He sent Jesus to rescue God's people from their sins. God was making peace between Himself and sinners through Jesus.

Upon telling the shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth and how to find Him, the angel was joined by thousands of other angels who began singing about the greatness of God. That dark, quiet night sky was filled with a beautiful, blinding light and roaring song that left the shepherds forever changed. Once they had heard the news, the shepherds were desperate to go and find Jesus and see the marvelous thing that God had done.

*Ask: What is the greatest news someone has ever shared with you? What did you want to do in response?*

So the shepherds abandoned their sheep and raced to Bethlehem. Once they saw baby Jesus there in the manger, they left the stable and began telling everyone they saw the good news that the Savior had come. God used this group of men—men everyone despised—to tell the world that Jesus had come. As Jesus would do throughout His life, God was coming to sinners to show them the way to salvation.

*Ask: How can we be like the shepherds? As a family, whom can we tell that Jesus came to save sinners?*

God shows us many things about what's He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is glorious—that He shows His greatness and worth—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

## **Prayer**

Have one family member say a prayer to thank God for sending angels to share the good news of Jesus' birth to sinners just like us.

## **Song**

As a family, sing or listen to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With th’ angelic host proclaim,  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Christ, by highest heav’n adored:  
Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of the favored one.  
Veil’d in flesh, the Godhead see;  
Hail, th’incarnate Deity:  
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel!  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Hail! the heav’n born Prince of Peace!  
Hail! the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings.*

*Mild He lays His glory by,  
Born that man no more may die:  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

## **Family Activity**

One night this week, go out caroling as a family. As you visit homes of neighbors, friends and family, sing songs of praise about the birth and salvation of Jesus. It might be easiest to start at the home of someone you know who loves Jesus as you do. Sing praises to God and invite them to join you at the next house.

Make sure you visit at least one home of people who do not love and trust Jesus. Just like God showed grace and love to the lowliest of sinners, share the good news of Jesus' birth with someone who does not know God. Maybe that person will hear the good news and will believe in Jesus.

## **Additional Activities**

*(examples and instructions can be found on The Village's Pinterest boards)*

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the shepherds and angel pieces and add them to the set.

Spend time imagining what the "glory of the Lord" shining down on the shepherds was like. Draw what you think it looked like. Or turn off the lights and recreate it with flashlights, candles, props and loud singing.

Draw or paint what you think the night sky might have looked like when the angels appeared to the shepherds.



# **Week 4**

*The Promise for All Peoples: The Journey of the Magi*

DECEMBER 18 - 24

# WEEK 4

## - PERSONAL STUDY -

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.'*"

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."*

*After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

**MATTHEW 2:1-12**

**What is the farthest you have ever traveled from home?**

**How did it feel to be outside your normal setting?**

**What made you uncomfortable? What did you find interesting and new?**

**How did the experience change the way you understand the world?**

## ***The Promise for All Peoples***

Magi were men trained in astrology, dream interpretation and other mysteries. They studied the sky and knew the stars and their significance. The Magi mentioned in Matthew 2 lived in the East, probably near Persia. We do not know their exact identity and origin. What we do know is that they were not Jews—they were Gentiles. It is possible that these men heard of the promised Savior from Jews residing in their land during the Babylonian captivity. When they saw the star signifying His birth, they left their home for Jerusalem, embarking on a journey to find the newborn King and worship Him.

At least two things are striking about the events that unfold in Matthew 2. The first is that these men were Gentiles. They were not of Israel, not descendants of Abraham. Why should the birth of the Messiah matter to them? The second is that God was the One who announced the birth of His Son to the Gentile world. God appointed a star to herald the news of Jesus' coming. God set that star in the sight of these Magi. God used that star to lead them to His Son so they could worship Him as the rightful King.

This scene in the Advent narrative whispers of an incredible mercy: God reveals His Son and extends salvation to the nations. Men and women from every people, tribe and tongue will taste the honey-like sweetness of Jesus' name upon their lips, confessing Him as Lord and worshipping Him as King. Jesus is worthy. Only He deserves the glory, honor and praise of the nations.

In the same way God set a star in the sky to lead the Magi to Jesus, He places His children in their neighborhoods, workplaces, PTA meetings and lecture halls to do the same. You don't have to go overseas to impact the nations. God brings them to our doorstep—refugees, international students, those in search of greater opportunities and freedom. The nations may very well live next door. Being part of God's global purposes may be as simple as reaching out to people He has placed in your everyday life. Or you may indeed go to the ends of the earth and happily herald the good news to those who have never heard because God is worthy of their worship.

The world is big, and the gospel is not an American idea. The gospel has been proclaimed to us too; the mercy of God extended to the Gentiles means that mercy has been extended to us. The story of the Magi stirs our hearts to look beyond our familiar comforts and remember that it is our joyful duty to bring that gospel to all nations for the glory of God. We want to be a part of what God is doing as He continues to draw men, women and children from all nations to come and worship His Son.

## ***Reflection***

Look up Psalm 86:9. What promise do you see in this verse? What reassurance does the story of the Magi give us about the spreading of the gospel? How should the story challenge us as those who are called to tell the good news?

What common reasons do Christians give for not spreading the gospel to all nations? Are any of these reasons valid?

How is being compelled by the glory and worth of God more powerful than being motivated by guilt or duty when it comes to reaching the nations?

Look up Ephesians 2:11-17. In this passage, who are “those who were far off”? Are people in foreign countries farther off from the gospel than you were when you first heard it? Explain.

What is the primary means God uses to make disciples of all nations? How can you take an active role in taking the gospel to all nations in the upcoming year? List some specific ideas.

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

## ***Response***

Think of someone you know who is actively involved in reaching the nations with the gospel. Take time this week to pray for them by name and write them an encouraging email or letter.

In the next few weeks, notice how many people from other nationalities you see in the rhythm of your everyday life. Ask the Lord to give you faith and favor in building relationships and sharing the gospel.

## ***Songs of the Season***

*Joy to the World*

*O Come, All Ye Faithful*

*Go! Tell it on the Mountain*

*We Three Kings*



# WEEK 4

- F A M I L Y   D I S C I P L E S H I P   T I M E -

*Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how only God is worthy of all glory. Consider sitting outside as you talk about the journey of the Magi, drawing particular attention to the stars in the night sky above you. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.*

## ***Lighting of the Advent Candle***

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first three weeks and a fourth candle.

## ***Scripture Reading***

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." **MATTHEW 2:1-2***

*The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three Wise Men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the King God had promised David all those years before. **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE***

*And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. **MATTHEW 2:11-12***

## ***Reflection***

*Have an adult read the commentary below.*

The first people God told about Jesus' birth were the shepherds. He used a spectacular mass of angels to shout from the skies that Jesus had come. But the angels were not alone in proclaiming the good news that night, and the shepherds were not the only people to learn of the Rescuer's coming.

That same night, God placed a special star in the sky, a bright body of light that announced the birth of

the King. Some men in a faraway country saw this star. These men were called Magi. They were educated men who studied the skies and nature. Most scholars believe these men came from Persia, or modern-day Iran. There was something very special about these men.

Throughout the Bible, God promised to send a Rescuer to save the Israelites from their sins. But these Magi were not Israelites. They were Gentiles. That means they were not from Abraham's family and likely did not know and worship God. But that night, God did something that no one expected.

By placing that star in the sky, God showed unbelievable mercy toward all people. In showing the Magi that Jesus, the King of heaven, had been born, God was extending salvation to people of all nations.

When the Magi saw the special star that God had placed in the sky, they left their home country to find Jesus. Their journey took a long time. They did not arrive in Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. In fact, it may have taken them up to two years to reach the place where Jesus was.

The Bible tells us that when the Magi found the place where Jesus was living with Mary and Joseph, they entered the house, bowed down and worshiped this small child who had come to save sinners. They then gave Jesus precious, costly gifts.

*Ask: Why do you think the Magi were willing to leave their homes and families and travel for such a long time to find Jesus? What did they know and believe about Him? Why do you think they brought baby Jesus such special, expensive gifts?*

Throughout the Advent story, we see that God is generous. He sent a company of angels to shout the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, and He put a special star in the sky to guide men from a faraway country to Jesus. He desires that all people know, love, trust and obey Him. And God promises that one day men, women and children from every tribe, tongue and nation will worship Jesus. God will rescue people from all over the world, and we will worship Him as He deserves.

God shows us many things about what He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is worthy—that only He deserves all glory—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

## **Prayer**

Have one family member say a prayer to praise God and ask Him to show people of all nations the good news that Jesus came to save sinners.

## **Song**

As a family, sing or listen to “O Come All Ye Faithful.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold Him born the King of angels;  
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him  
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.  
Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation  
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above;  
Glory to God in the highest:  
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him  
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

*Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to thee be glory given;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:  
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him  
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*

## **Family Activity**

Spend time this week looking at a map of the world. Play a game where you name a country and your kids try to find it. Talk together about what it would be like to live in a different culture with a different language and customs. Point out places in the world where people aren't free to openly worship Jesus or talk about Him.

Look together at the list of missionaries on our church website. Pick one person or family and pray for them by name. If possible, write them an email or note of encouragement.

## **Additional Activities**

*(examples and instructions can be found on The Village's Pinterest boards)*

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the Magi pieces and add them to the set.

Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus' birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.



# Christmas Eve

# CHRISTMAS EVE

- F A M I L Y D I S C I P L E S H I P T I M E -

***Set aside ten minutes to talk about God's faithfulness in sending a Savior. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.***

## ***Lighting of the Advent Candle***

Have one person light the candles from the first four weeks, remembering together what you've learned about God's faithfulness during Advent. After reading Luke 2:1-20, have another person light the fifth candle—the Christ candle.

## ***Scripture Reading***

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

*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 great 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. **LUKE 2:1-20**

## **Song**

Sing or listen to “Silent Night” together. As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*Silent night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child  
Holy infant, so tender and mild  
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace*

*Silent night, holy night  
Shepherds quake at the sight  
Glories stream from heaven afar  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!  
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!*

*Silent night, holy night  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from thy holy face  
With the dawn of redeeming grace  
Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.*

*Silent night, holy night  
Wondrous star lend thy light  
With the angels let us sing  
Alleluia to our King  
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!*

## **Prayer**

Have one person pray, thanking God for His incredible faithfulness in sending Jesus to save His people from their sins.