



**Advent 2023**

**River West Church**

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS ADVENT?

Advent. For you, this might one of those “churchy” words you’re familiar with only because you’ve heard it once a year after Thanksgiving. You know when you hear this word—“advent”—Christmas is right around the corner (the season of lights, decorations, gifts, and holiday dinners with Uncle Bob). But Advent is so much more than this. And it’s certainly more than the modern conception of Christmas you’ll find at Washington Square Mall...

Advent is the season that kicks off the cycle of the Christian liturgical calendar. ***It’s a time marked by yearning, longing, and anticipation for the Messiah who has come, and has yet to come again.***

“Advent” is English for the Latin *adventus*, which means “coming” or “arrival.” It takes place during the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day—the celebration that the darkness of our world has met the great light of our Savior.

Therefore, it’s a season devoted to preparing the church for the coming of Christ into our world. We do this by *looking back* to meditate on the incarnation—when God himself stepped into the fragility of human existence to reclaim his world ravaged by the darkness of sin. However, Advent is also a time where the church *looks forward*, in hope, when Christ will return to cast out darkness forever and usher in the kingdom of the new heavens and new earth.

***Advent is a time marked by yearning, longing, and anticipation for the Messiah who has come, and has yet to come again.***

What if, this Advent, you welcomed the tension? That we, as Christians, sit between what *has happened* and what *has yet to take place*? How could this reignite Gospel hope within you and reinvigorate you toward faithfulness? During Advent we are reminded that we take seriously the brokenness of our world, yet we do not live without hope! Allow Advent to do its work welling up both gratitude and hope within you.

***Advent is a time marked by yearning, longing, and anticipation for the Messiah who has come, and has yet to come again.***

## **WHAT SHOULD OUR POSTURE BE?**

Christmas, in the modern American sense, can be confusing. On one hand, it's a jolly time, filled with singing and celebration! On the other hand, we are often anxious and stressed, moving at a frenetic pace to get all our holiday plans in order.

Every individual and family enters this season their own way, with their own plans and traditions—for better or worse.

In the Christian calendar, Advent invites the believer to slow down: to rest in God, contemplate the reality of God become man, and celebrate the promise that Christ will return at his second advent.

If you move too quickly, you may miss the work the Lord is doing in you and around you. Therefore, the Christian posture during Advent is absolutely one of celebration! But it's also one of contemplation, slowing down, and even confession. May this Advent recalibrate your soul and the pace at which you find yourself moving.

## **BEST PRACTICES IN ADVENT**

Throughout church history, Christians have engaged in many practices that help orient us to the season of Advent. Such practices include singing, confession, fasting, wreaths, prayer, candle lighting, and more. Below are three practices for us to engage in to help us slow down, live as witnesses, and welcome the season with intentionality.

**Sunday Gatherings** :: During Advent, let's make gathering with the community of saints a priority. Amid the holiday to-dos and social gatherings, church is often, unfortunately, the first thing to go. Each Sunday at River West, we'll read Scripture, light the Advent candles, and pray together to draw our attention to Advent.

**Generosity and Simplicity** :: Christmas in America is marked by consumerism, and it's easy to get caught up in it. But what if we acted as witnesses to a watching world and, instead of consuming, we gave away time, money, and ourselves? That instead of more we went with less? That instead of being served, we served others? During Advent, find a non-

profit or church to give to, and instead of buying more, donate clothes or furniture to one of our ministry partners in Portland.

**Prayer, Scripture, and Advent Candles ::** Let's enter Advent with purpose and intentionality. Let's not miss the Lord's work! Find a time in your day when you can devote intentional time with the Lord, and focus on the themes of Advent. (The good news is much of the work is already done for you—that's what this guide is for!)

## **HOW TO USE THIS ADVENT GUIDE**

This guide is intended to aid you in your personal time with the Lord. Each week lists an order of practices to follow (liturgy). It includes prayers, sections of the Christmas Story in the Gospel of Luke, questions to contemplate, and a short reading for each day of the week. Christmas eve and day follow a different order and are intended to be a little shorter.

Use this guide as it best suits you! You can use it individually, with a friend or spouse, or with your whole family! There might be elements in this guide you aren't used to practicing, but we encourage you to lean in and give it a try. Lastly, start where you're at! Even if that means reading just one passage for the week, the point is simply to read Scripture this Advent.

We hope this guide gives you a helpful structure to navigate Advent with intentionality and a posture of worship!

**Have a wonderful Advent and a merry Christmas!**

**With Love,  
Pastor Derrick**



# THE HOPE OF ADVENT

DEC 3 - 9

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

Begin your time in silence. *“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).*

## OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
I praise you and worship you! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Reawaken *HOPE* in me as your first advent renewed me and your second advent will renew all creation. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS STORY REFLECTION | LUKE 1:26-45

Read the Christmas passage of the week. Then reflect on this question:  
How does this passage show the *hope* of the Gospel?

## PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Cause your Word to take root in the soil of my soul! May your Word pass from my eyes and ears to my heart; from my heart to my lips and conversation; that, as the rain does not return empty, so neither may your Word, but accomplish that for which it is given. Amen.

## READING PLAN

### MONDAY

Genesis 3:15, 22-24

### TUESDAY

2 Samuel 7:1-29

### WEDNESDAY

Isaiah 7:14

### THURSDAY

Isaiah 11:1-10

### FRIDAY

Matthew 1:1-17

### SATURDAY

Revelation 22:6-21

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

After reading, spend another 60 seconds in silence, sitting with what you just read in Scripture.

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**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory,  
forever and ever, Amen.

**PRAYER FOR THE WEEK**

Almighty God,  
Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ took on flesh in humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to everlasting life. We pray this through Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**END WITH LISTENING PRAYER**

Having in mind all that you have prayed and read, end your time with a few moments of silence, praying this prayer: *“Lord, what do you want to say to me today?”* Feel free to journal your thoughts.

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# THE JOY OF ADVENT

DEC 10 - 16

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

Begin your time in silence. “*Be still and know that I am God*” (Ps. 46:10).

## OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
I praise you and worship you! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Renew the *JOY* of your salvation in me today, as I—with all creation—will *REJOICE* at your second advent! Amen!

## CHRISTMAS STORY REFLECTION | LUKE 1:46-56

Read the Christmas passage of the week. Then reflect on this question: How does Mary’s song illustrate *joy* in the Gospel? How does it inspire *joy* in you?

## PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Cause your Word to take root in the soil of my soul! May your Word pass from my eyes and ears to my heart; from my heart to my lips and conversation; that, as the rain does not return empty, so neither may your Word, but accomplish that for which it is given. Amen.

## READING PLAN

MONDAY

Isaiah 9:2-7

TUESDAY

Zechariah 9:9

WEDNESDAY

Malachi 3:1

THURSDAY

Matthew 1:18-25

FRIDAY

Philippians 2:5-11

SATURDAY

Philippians 2:12-18

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

After reading, spend another 60 seconds in silence, sitting with what you just read in Scripture.

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# THE LOVE OF ADVENT

DEC 17 - 23

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

Begin your time in silence. *“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).*

## OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
I praise you and worship you! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Today, may I encounter your *LOVE* once again, that I would be a conduit of your *LOVE* to those around me. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS STORY REFLECTION | LUKE 1:57-80

Read the Christmas passage of the week. Then reflect on this question: Where do you see God’s *love* in this passage? How have you encountered his *love* for you this Advent?

## PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
Cause your Word to take root in the soil of my soul! May your Word pass from my eyes and ears to my heart; from my heart to my lips and conversation; that, as the rain does not return empty, so neither may your Word, but accomplish that for which it is given. Amen.

## READING PLAN

**MONDAY**  
Zephaniah 3:14-20

**TUESDAY**  
Psalm 118

**WEDNESDAY**  
John 1:1-18

**THURSDAY**  
Matthew 2:1-12

**FRIDAY**  
Matthew 2:13 – 3:2

**SATURDAY**  
Revelation 12:1-12

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

After reading, spend another 60 seconds in silence, sitting with what you just read in Scripture.

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## **THE LORD’S PRAYER**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory,  
forever and ever, Amen.

## **PRAYER FOR THE WEEK**

Heavenly Father,

With great love and power, come among us. And because we are so often hindered by our sin, let your bountiful grace and mercy help us and deliver us. For you so loved the world that you gave your only Son! It’s in his name, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, we honor and glorify, now and forevermore. Amen.

## **END WITH LISTENING PRAYER**

Having in mind all that you have prayed and read, end your time with a few moments of silence, praying this prayer: “*Lord, what do you want to say to me today?*” Feel free to journal your thoughts.

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# THE PEACE OF ADVENT

DEC 24

## **JOIN US!**

Join us at River West Church for our candlelight Christmas Eve worship gatherings! Gathering times are 2pm, 4pm, and 11pm. Childcare will be available at 2pm and 4pm.

Either before or after our worship gatherings, feel free to work through the following liturgy—whether by yourself or with friends, family, or children.

## **60 SECONDS OF SILENCE**

Begin your time in silence. *“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).*

## **CHRISTMAS STORY REFLECTION | LUKE 1 - 2:40**

If reading with children, it’s best to use an easy translation like NIV since it’s a lot of text. Then reflect on this question: How is the Christmas Story a story about peace? How has Jesus brought peace to your life?

## **60 SECONDS OF SILENCE**

After reading, spend another 60 seconds in silence, sitting with what you just read in Scripture.

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## PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

This prayer comes from Ken Gire's book, *Intimate Moments with the Savior: Learning to Love*, page 7:

Dear Jesus,

Though there was no room for you in the inn, grant this day that I might make abundant room for you in my heart. Though your own did not receive you, grant this hour that I may embrace you with open arms. Though Bethlehem overlooked you in the shuffle of the census, grant me the grace, this quiet moment, to be still and know that you are God. You, whose only palace was a stable, whose only throne was a feeding trough, whose only robes were swaddling clothes.

On my knees I confess that I am too conditioned to this world's pomp and pageantry to recognize God cooing in a manger.

Forgive me. Please. And help me understand at least some of what your birth has to teach—that divine power is not mediated through strength, but through weakness; that true greatness is not achieved through the assertion of rights, but through their release; and that even the most secular of things can be sacred when you are in their midst.

And for those times when you yearn for my fellowship and stand at the door and knock, grant me a special sensitivity to the sound of that knock so I may be quick to my feet. Keep me from letting you stand out in the cold or from ever sending you away to some stable. May my heart be warm and inviting, so that when you do knock, a worthy place will always be waiting ... ”

# CHRISTMAS DAY | DEC 25

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

Begin your time in silence. *“Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).*

## OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
I praise you and worship you! Turn my affections toward you as I seek your presence. Today, may I experience afresh the peace you bring in a world filled with darkness and chaos. May I go forth from here, this Christmas Day, as a non-anxious presence bearing your name, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

## CHRISTMAS DAY READINGS

Read the following passages and see if you notice a pattern or theme. Feel free to take time throughout the day to read through all of them, or do so in one sitting.

- Genesis 3:15
- Isaiah 7:14
- Matthew 1:21-23
- Luke 2:8-21
- Titus 3:4-7
- Revelation 12
- Revelation 21:1-4

## 60 SECONDS OF SILENCE

After reading, spend another 60 seconds in silence, sitting with what you just read in Scripture.

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## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory,  
forever and ever, Amen.”

## **PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS DAY**

Almighty God,  
You have given your only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and  
to be born this day of a virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again  
and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by  
your Holy Spirit. We pray this through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom  
with you and the Holy Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

# APPENDIX

## **BIBLE PROJECT | ADVENT WORD STUDY SERIES**

To get a better understanding of each Advent theme and word, our friends at Bible Project put together a Bible word study series that covers each word used for Advent.

Click the URL below each word to open the video in your internet browser.

### **HOPE**

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/yakhal-hope](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/yakhal-hope)

### **JOY**

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/chara-joy](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/chara-joy)

### **LOVE**

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/agape-love](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/agape-love)

### **PEACE**

[bibleproject.com/explore/video/shalom-peace](https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/shalom-peace)