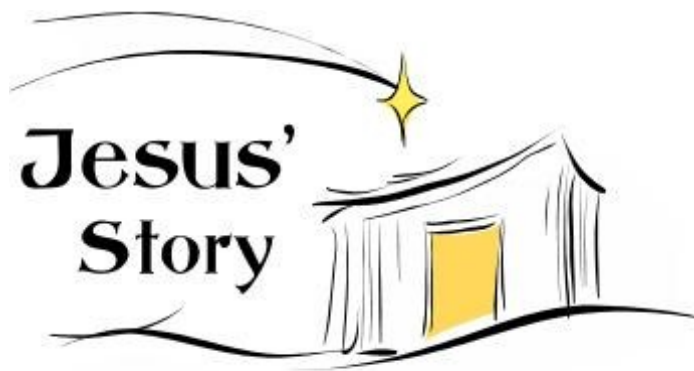


BORN *a CHILD and yet a KING*



*2011 Advent Season Reading
Threads Church ~ Kids' Community*

*The Shepherds had an Angel,
The Wise Men had a star,
But what have I, a little child,
To guide me home from far,
Where glad stars sing together
And singing angels are?*

*Those Shepherds through the lonely night
Sat watching by their sheep,
Until they saw the heavenly host
Who neither tire nor sleep,
All singing 'Glory glory'
In festival they keep.*

*Christ watches me, His little lamb,
Cares for me day and night,
That I may be His own in heaven:
So angels clad in white
Shall sing their 'Glory glory'
For my sake in the height.*

Christina Rosetti, from "A Christmas Carol: For My Godchildren"

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the CHURCH SEASON *of* ADVENT

When Jesus was born, the heavens broke wide open and an army of angels sang:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is
pleased!

In announcing Jesus birth, the angels said they were bringing “good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.”

Traditionally, the Church has used the season of Advent as a time to celebrate that “good news of great joy.”

What is Advent?

Since the fourth century, the Church has celebrated the season of Advent (which means “coming” or “arrival”) starting on the fourth Sunday before Christmas day. The celebration of Advent helps us focus our attention on Jesus Christ’s birth and ministry as well as his promised return.

Throughout the season we are constantly reminded that Jesus Christ is the Savior *and King* of the world.



MAKING SENSE *of* ADVENT

The days leading up to Christmas are filled with distractions. There are presents to buy, parties to attend, dinners to plan, cards to send, family to see, songs to sing, movies to watch, and traditions to follow. We need help to cut through the many distractions of the Christmas season if we are to focus our attention on Jesus. This set of Advent readings is designed to help you do that – with others.

Perhaps there is no better time than Advent to gather with family and friends of all ages and talk about Jesus. This devotional tells the story of Jesus, from the promise of his birth to the promise of his return, through five familiar passages from the Bible. It then invites you, through reading, discussion and prayer to reflect on those passages.

If you have children, you may find the children's prayers and the references to stories in *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones helpful in getting your children involved in the discussions. (You can purchase *The Jesus Storybook Bible* at a local bookstore, through *Amazon.com...* or at a Sunday worship gathering during the Advent season.) Your children will also probably enjoy singing the songs with you.



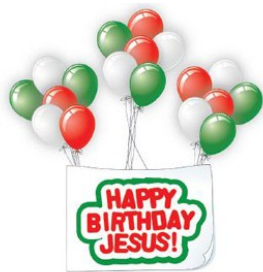
CELEBRATING ADVENT

These Advent readings are not meant in any way to replace your participation in Worship Gatherings, within the Threads Community or on Mission. In fact, it is meant to encourage your involvement in such practices during the Advent season.



Join the conversation during our main Worship Gathering on Sunday mornings at 10:00am.

Commit to your kids going deeper into Jesus' Story during our Kids' Community Backyard Gatherings on Sunday mornings at 10:00am



There's a space for our preschoolers too! They will be celebrating God's best gift to us through the entire month of December.

May you know the blessings of Jesus this Advent season and for years to come.



WEEK ONE of ADVENT

Week of Sunday, November 20th

READING: *Isaiah 9:2-7* *New Living Translation (NLT)*

The Promise of a King -

Have you ever been promised something that seemed too good to be true?

That's the kind of promise God's people received in Isaiah 9. They were promised light in the places that only knew darkness. They were promised freedom instead of slavery. They were promised glory instead of shame. They were promised peace instead of war.

They were promised a child. Not just any child. They were promised a king – better than any king they knew. They were promised a king whose reign would be known by things like justice, righteousness, and peace. They were promised a king whose reign would be without end.

They were promised an eternal king who would make everything right. Forever.

Shedding Some Light -

When Isaiah spoke of such things, few listened and few believed. For those who did believe, it wasn't Isaiah they believed, but instead the God who promised again and again that his passion for his people would make this miracle happen.

As kings came and went, as leaders rose and fell, God's people were tempted to doubt his promises. The stories of God's past deliverance seemed like ancient history to many people under the oppressive rule of a foreign king or the unjust rule of one of their own kings. So while they longed for the deliverer Isaiah promised, it was tough to really hope God's promise would come true.

Why was God taking so long? Did he remember? Did he care?

God did remember. God did care. When the time was right, he sent his son Jesus – the promised Messiah, the great and everlasting king. Jesus was everything Isaiah promised and more.

Now, on this side of Jesus' birth, we face a situation similar to those in Isaiah's day. We read of Jesus' promised return, when the work he started will be complete. When everything (including us!) will be made right. Forever.

Restoration takes time... and we believe God has asked us to join him now in this work of restoring each other and the world around us. When change doesn't happen as quickly as we'd like, we start to wonder if God remembers or if he cares, we also start to wonder why we should care. When that happens, worship becomes ritual, obedience becomes a burden, and Jesus' return becomes something we think about only when things get really, really bad.

Do you long to see the world around us restored? If so , why? If not, why not?

Do you recognize things in your own life, in your family, in your community, in this world that aren't as they are supposed to be? If so, take some time to imagine how they would be if they were completely restored.

Adult's and Children's Prayer -

Restore us, Lord Jesus. Use us, to restore the world around us.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Reference - "Operation 'No More Tears!'" p. 144



WEEK TWO *of* ADVENT

Week of Sunday, December 4th

READING: *Luke 1:68-79* *New Living Translation (NLT)*

The Promise of a Child -

Old Zechariah was promised something that seemed too good to be true: The angel Gabriel told him his old, barren wife would give birth to a son. Zechariah thought it too good to be true. People like them don't have babies. So Zechariah asked the angel for a sign, something to prove the promise true.

The angel gave him a sign: Zechariah didn't speak again until his son was born.

When he finally spoke again, he sang a song of prophecy. He used language from his Bible (the Old Testament) to praise God for keeping his promises and delivering his people.

He also said his son, John, would tell people to do what Zechariah didn't do: Take God at his word.

Shedding Some Light -

When we sing the songs of Advent, in many ways we are singing the song of Zechariah. We sing songs founded on the images and promises of hope and expectation. We sing of promises fulfilled (God has visited and redeemed his people); we sing, longing for promises to be fulfilled.

For the past two thousand years, God's people have waited for Jesus' return and his ultimate restoration. Every year we remember his birth and the advent of the good news of his work. As we remember, we also hunger and long for him to continue his restoration work in us, and through us, as he completes the work of redemption in our lives and in his created world.

Adult's and Children's Prayer -

Dear Father, help us to be rooted in the salvation story of your people. Help us to find hope in your mighty works in history. During this season especially, quicken our spirits to meditate on the birth of Jesus Christ, the continued gift and work of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' promised return and ultimate restoration. Amen.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Reference - "Heaven breaks through" p.200



WEEK THREE *of* ADVENT

Week of Sunday, December 11th

READING: *Luke 2:1-7* *New Living Translation (NLT)*

The Birth of a Child -

Both Isaiah and Zechariah remembered God's mighty acts in the past. They spoke of God's great promises for the future. They both spoke of God's greatest deliverance in terms that both echoed and surpassed his mighty acts of the past: The final deliverance of his people through the total destruction of their enemies.

Yet when God acted in fulfillment of his great promises, it was all so ordinary. The king arrived, but he came as a child.

Shedding Some Light -

God came to earth as a child. Childbirth isn't exactly a grand entrance. A feeding trough for animals isn't exactly a king's bed. If Luke's account of Jesus' birth is anything, it's ordinary. It's obscure. It's seemingly inconsequential.

"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." (1Cor. 1:27)

God accomplished his plan through a child, born into poverty, in an obscure town, to a couple of young, first-time parents.

What does God's ability to accomplish redemption through a child tell you about his power and control? What does it tell you about the way he exercises that power and control?

How does Jesus' coming as a child demonstrate his humility? How does it help you understand the way he loves you?
How does reading about Christ's birth encourage humility in the way you live?

Adult's Prayer -

Jesus, eternal Son of God, you left the glories of heaven for the mess of earth. You made yourself nothing. You came to earth as a child. You faced the miseries of this life. You took upon yourself the wrath of God. You died on a cross. You stayed in the grave for three days. You did this to save your people from their sins. Thank you.

Child's Prayer -

Jesus, thank you for leaving heaven and coming to earth as a baby.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Reference - "He's Here!" p.176



WEEK FOUR of ADVENT

Week of Sunday, December 18th

READING: *Luke 2:8-20* *New Living Translation (NLT)*

The Birth of a King -

In pictures and descriptions of Jesus' birth, the angels attending are often portrayed as chubby cherubim, lightly plucking at harp and lyre. They hardly seem scary, or the type of characters that would frighten hardened shepherds.

The heavenly band of angels was an angelic 'host' or literally an army of angels. They came to announce peace. The peace they announced would come as God's enemies were destroyed by God's son and king, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

To show how significant the birth of Jesus is, we are given a glimpse of the angelic host only rivaled by the visions of John in the book of Revelation. Jesus' birth is a cataclysmic in-breaking of God's kingdom into the earthly realm. This is a visual picture of the Lords' prayer, "Thy Kingdom come."

Shedding Some Light -

God spares no expense at the announcement of Jesus' birth. He enlists not just a heavenly quartet, or a single shimmering soloist, but the whole heavenly throng, singing together as a big, heavenly gospel choir, rocking the foundations of humanity.

The angels' message is simple and straightforward and not in the least bit clouded in celestial language or heavenly rhetoric. "Good News! The Savior is born!" with a chorus "Glory to God" and "Peace on Earth."

God keeps his promise to his people. The king is here. Jesus is born.

Why is this a reason to rejoice?

Adult's Prayer -

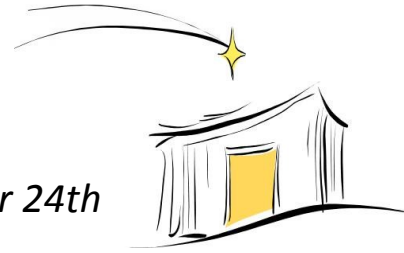
Almighty God, when we find our hearts distracted in the busy-ness of this Christmas season, enamor us with the glory and joy of your presence. Let us understand why the birth of Jesus was "good news of great joy."

Child's Prayer -

Dear Heavenly God, give us the same joy and excitement as the angels who proclaimed Jesus' birth.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Reference - "The Light of the whole world"
p.184

CHRISTMAS DAY
Week of Sunday, December 24th



READING: *Luke 2:1-7 New Living Translation (NLT)*

Shedding Some Light -

It all seems so simple and ordinary: An imperial edict, a pregnant teenager, a soon-to-be husband, and a town full of people simply following the law of the land. Ordinary events of history, ordained by God as part of the greatest miracle in the history of the world: The Son of God being born as a child in the city of David. And it all happened when “the time came.”

In Galatians 4:4-5 Paul writes, “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*”

The God who rules history, entered our history, to claim us and all our tomorrow as his own.

This Christmas morning, join the Apostle Paul as he proclaims the gloriousness of the gospel (1 Timothy 3:16):

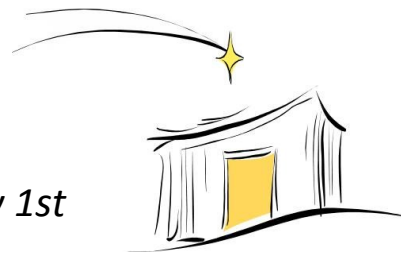
*Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith:
Christ was revealed in a human body and vindicated by the Spirit.
He was seen by angels and announced to the nations.
He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in
glory.*

And join the Apostle John as he prays in response to Jesus’ proclamation, “*Surely I am coming soon,*” with the following: “*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rev 22:20)

The Jesus Storybook Bible Reference -“He’s Here!” p.176

EPIPHANY

Week of Sunday, January 1st



READING: *Matthew 2:1-12* *New Living Translation (NLT)*

Jesus, Light of the World -

Epiphany, traditionally celebrated on January 6, reminds us that Christmas is more than a celebration of the birth of a child or a time to gather together as families. Epiphany reminds us that the child who was born in Bethlehem was Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world.

The story of the wise men is more than a nice story about giving presents at Christmas time. It tells us how God used a star and some pagan astrologers to display his ultimate goal for the whole world: People from every nation worshiping his son Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Shedding Some Light -

When the wise men arrived at the home of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, they gave Jesus gifts fit for a king. But they didn't just give him stuff. They "fell down and worshiped him."

As we read about these men "from the east" (non-Jews) worshiping "he who has been born king of the Jews," we are reminded of God's plan for the nations. We long to see innumerable number of people from every nation praising to King Jesus. And we consider the ways God has called us to take this good news to the nations.

Spend some time thinking, talking, and praying about how God would have you join him on his mission this next year.

Adult's and Children's Prayer -

Jesus, help us tell others about the good news of your life, your death, your resurrection, your reigning as king over all things, through all we say and do.
Amen.

The Jesus Storybook Bible Reference - "The King of All Kings," p.192