

CHRIST CHURCH SMALL GROUPS

Study Guide for December: Advent Scripture



For the month of December, we will study the season of Advent and three of our Advent lectionary Sunday texts.

This guide will give you a primer on the history of the season of Advent and themes of the lectionary readings. There are also questions for Small Group study.

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

History: Advent may have its origins outside of Rome as a preparation for baptism at Epiphany in the fourth century. In the fifth century, Perpetuus, Bishop of Tours, decreed a fast from Martinmas (Nov. 11) to Christmas Day as a time of preparation and penitence. Gregory the Great (6-7th C Bishop) fixed the length of this time of preparation to four weeks.

Duration: Advent in our modern time begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas. This means that the exact calendar date that Advent begins is different every year. This year, Advent (conveniently) begins December 1 because December 1 is the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent can start as early as November 27 or as late as December 3. As such, Advent will always have at minimum 22 days or at maximum 28.

Themes: **The coming or approach of Jesus Christ**
The word “Advent” comes from the Latin *adventus* or the coming/the approach. Jesus comes to us in three ways: in the flesh in Baptism, daily in our hearts, and in glory at the end of time. The scripture of Advent will walk us through all three of these comings at various times. There will be stories of the coming Christ-child, stories of Christ alive in our hearts through faith, and prophecies that Jesus will come again in great glory at the end of the age.

A time of “now” and “not yet”

The great tension of Advent is that we live in a “time between.” The time of the coming of Christ is now, in the Word preached, in the sacraments shared, and in our hearts through faith. Yet the time of the coming of Christ to consummate all things is not yet. This is why Jesus and the prophets tell us that we are in a time of preparing and waiting for the day of his coming again in glory.

Preparing and waiting

The two phrases you’ll see throughout Advent are “prepare!” and “keep watch!” We want to be prepared for Christ to come again in glory. We also want to keep watch for the ways he quietly comes into our life each day. Waiting is hard. We become impatient, frustrated, and disappointed. Christians wait with hope and assurance that God is faithful and that Christ will come again. Until our eyes behold him, we prepare for his arrival, and we wait with hope.

FIRST STUDY PASSAGE

Luke 21:25-33 (Gospel reading for the weekend of November 30-December 1)

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” ²⁹ He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Study Questions:

1. There will be signs, Jesus says, that alert us to the day of his return. Are the signs comforting? What emotional responses do the signs elicit from you?
2. Jesus comes to us daily in faith and vividly in the sacraments and word proclaimed. What are the signs that you feel the presence of Christ in your midst?
3. We wait for the second coming of Christ to consummate all things. It could be tomorrow, or it could be many more millennia. How do you prepare for this time?
4. What is the worst part about waiting? What gives you hope when waiting for something to happen that may not occur in your lifetime?

SECOND STUDY PASSAGE

Luke 3:1-6 (Gospel reading for the weekend of December 7-8)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracōnitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. ⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.’”

Study Questions:

1. The passage begins with the naming of actual governors and leaders of Rome and Judea. Why do you think Luke did this? Why is it important to place Jesus’ birth within the context of the surrounding political leaders?
2. This passage is about the prophet John, forerunner and pointer to Jesus. John is the voice in the wilderness crying: “prepare the way of the Lord.” How do we prepare? What do your preparations for Christmas look like today? What are the aims of your preparation, and could they have more focus on God? How?
3. We are to make straight paths for the Lord. Let’s think about that metaphorically: what in our life do we need to straighten out before we come face to face with Jesus? Is there anything you can do this season of Advent to make straight something that is crooked in your life? What’s one small step you can make today?
4. All people will see God’s salvation. There’s almost too much to unpack here! Let’s simplify: What does God’s salvation look like to you? Is it something we’ll experience in this life or the next?

THIRD STUDY PASSAGE

Luke 1:39-45 (Gospel reading for the weekend of December 21-22)

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Study Questions:

1. Mary tells her relative Elizabeth that she will give birth to a special child. In one word, describe Mary's reaction. Now put yourself in Mary's place. How would you react?
2. As we get closer to Christmas and the arrival of the Christ-child, what emotions do you feel? Are they positive or negative?
3. In my Thanksgiving Day sermon this November, I said that gratitude is the antidote to our anxiety. What are you grateful for this season?
4. What gives you hope as you wait for Christmas Day?