

# Advent with CrossPointe





In Jupiter Park, a six-foot tall bronzed statue of a man and woman stare out to sea. The statue was erected to memorialize the disappearance of Austin Stephanos and Perry Cohen. The friends disappeared on July 24, 2016, during a fishing trip.

## Waiting for His Return

A bronze couple stares east, past Jupiter Inlet, as fishing boats speed by. Their gaze stalwart as they search for a loved one, stolen from them by a tempest at sea. The man's hand rests on the woman's briny shoulder as she shields her eyes from the sun. They wait and long for someone to make everything right—for a savior to rescue their loved one.

The couple embodies the longing many of us felt as we endured the uncertainty of canceled in-person worship services and ached for the hug of a distant loved one during the pandemic.

Like the couple overlooking the inlet, some of us experience grief even more profound.

Longing, anticipation, but also hope accompany us as we observe Advent—the four weeks in the church calendar during which Christians prepare for the coming of Christ—a season of darkness and lament before the light of the Messiah dawns.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we pray that you would take some time to reflect and anticipate your reunion with Christ. He is coming back! And because he's returning, we can always have hope despite the turmoil that might be going on around us. And like the couple who aches to see their loved one again, let's wait and seek Jesus's return together. When he returns, he will set his hand on your shoulder, and make everything the way it's supposed to be.

## **Week One:**

### Preparing for Christmas, Candle: Faith

#### Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

You may want to celebrate Advent this week as Christmas falls early this year so there isn't a traditional fourth week.

Historically the Church has practiced Advent as a time of watching, and waiting. The Latin word Advent means "come." Christians celebrate Advent by reenacting and looking forward in anticipation to Christ's return to Earth. Most of us will need to reorder our lives, even a little, to observe Advent. This is good! We are reordering other things to make room for Christ. God uses our practice of daily reordering of our desires from good things to him, so that we are able to wait and long for the One who is the source of faith, hope, joy and peace.

As we celebrate Advent, we practice waiting with other believers throughout time who have gone before us and will come after us—waiting eagerly as we watch for God's savior. First, we join with our brothers and sisters in the Old Testament as they anticipated the Messiah.

Now, we live in the time that theologians call the time in-between. In this second coming of Christ, we experience Jesus in the present, Immanuel (literally God with us), through the scripture and the Holy Spirit. This in-between time after Jesus came to earth as a baby—and the time he will return at the end of the age, is also full of longing as we ache for Jesus to return and make everything right.

The final coming of Christ that we celebrate is Christ's second coming. As Christians, we look forward with hope to Jesus's return and the new heaven and new Earth--it will finally forever be as Jesus taught us to pray, "Your Kingdom come, on Earth as it is in heaven."

## Questions for Reflection:

Take some time to prepare for advent this week. Think about the traditions and events you've done in the past over the holidays. Pray through if you still want to do all these things? Are there some traditions you can let go of this year (I'm looking at you Elf on the Shelf) in order to have more time for prayer and reflection? Ask your roommate or your kids what they think might be an event that seems like it can be left behind.

Ask friends and family, or reflect during some down time about a time you waited for something? What did it feel like to wait for a new job, a relationship, the completion of a degree. Maybe you are still waiting and longing for this time in your life to be different. What are you waiting for? How does observing what you long for help you understand what you desire? (Silly answers are valid.) How might waiting for these things help prepare us for waiting for Jesus's return? Maybe your desires or longings are less than what you'd like them to be? Ask God to help you desire good things—especially him.

## Advent Playlist:

We will sing these songs as we worship God together in church. We've included them here so that you can listen to them in your own devotional time.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/22azOzMujcWeKmgLMov9FR?si=dQ-ohbZzTjGOcPllBtnc5w&nd=1&dlsi=10fa2f09020f4d96>

## An Advent Wreath Invitation:

If you decide to celebrate Advent using an advent wreath, you will need:

1. Advent wreath, candles, matches or lighter
2. Christmas & advent hymns with words.
3. Put some thought into a daily or weekly time that works in your schedule to set aside ½ hour. For families, this might be just after dinner, or right before bedtime.
4. Flashlight(s)
5. Names of friends & family you want to pray for (ask the youngest ones in your group to volunteer someone to pray for that night.) Make sure kids have the opportunity to pray & suggest someone to pray for. You can select someone to pray for from the Christmas cards you've received in the mail that day.

## An Advent Rhythm:

Adjust the following suggestions to make the time you set apart to keep Advent work for you. A basic structure to celebrate Advent with an Advent wreath includes: lighting the candle(s), reading the scripture for that week, singing hymns (people enjoy suggesting a favorite), praying for someone from the community or your family, and blowing out the candles. Each week you'll light an additional candle until Christmas day when you will just light the large "Jesus" candle in the center.

Observing Advent can be done individually, in a community group, or with your family. But anytime you start something new, it can be messy. Try to have low expectations--not spiritually--but be prepared to jettison the hallmark ideal of hot cocoa & rose pedals. Instead, ask God to make himself known to you. You are creating space for the Holy Spirit to draw you to himself.

If you decided to sing hymns during your Advent time, remember that it's okay if you aren't the Von Trap family singers. It's not an audition. Some of my favorite memories of Advent are the times we all started singing in a different key and had to stop because we were crying too hard from laughter. It's okay if there's an argument about who gets to light or blow out the candles, that can be an opportunity to lean into God's grace. The main thing is that you set aside time to acknowledge God is present with you.

"Grace is not opposed to effort, but it is opposed to earning."

Dallas Willard

Advent is about creating space to experience God, and listen to him. When you observe spiritual practices, the mystery of what God does in the space you create, can't always be explained.

## **Week Two:**

Longing for Redemption: *The Coming of Christ in The Past*,  
Candle: Peace

### Isaiah 9:2

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.

### Reflection:

We have peace because, while we were still his enemy, Jesus came to Earth and initiated a relationship with us. Instantly, we went from darkness to light, not in our own strength, but because God sent his son for us.

Since we have peace with God, we can have peace with each other. And yet because of the fall, sin entered the world, and with sin came brokenness—in our families, in our political systems, and in our culture—even our own bodies carry the scars of a broken world and eventually betray us. All of creation struggles with sin because of the fall.

Several years ago, one of my kids ached with grief over the loss of a friend. As much as I wanted to make the pain go away for him, I could only truthfully say, “You’re right. The world is not supposed to be this way. You were never created to feel this brokenness.” Nothing I could do or say would ever explain away his pain. God didn’t create us to experience death or loss or grief. That is why we, like creation, long to be redeemed, to be made whole, to have peace on earth again.

### Questions for Reflection:

What do you think it means to long for redemption?

How do you reconcile the feeling that the world is not the way it’s supposed to be?

Sing your favorite hymns.

Pray for someone in your community.

Poem:

*Kenosis* by Luci Shaw

In sleep his infant mouth works in and out.

He is so new, his silk skin has not yet

been roughed by plane and wooden beam

nor, so far, has he had to deal with human doubt.

He is in a dream of nipple found,

of blue-white milk, of curving skin

and pulsing in his ear, the inner throb

of a warm heart's repeated sound.

His only memories float from fluid space.

So new he has not pounded nails, hung a door,

broken bread, felt rebuff, bent to the lash,

wept for the sad heart of the human race.

## **Week Three:**

Longing for Holiness: *The Coming of Christ in Our Present Moment*, Candle: Joy

### Revelation 3:14-22

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

### Reflection:

When my kids were little, they endlessly asked to play hide-and-go-seek and sardines. They were thrilled that someone searched for them—even if their giggles gave them away. Jesus came for us. We didn't go looking for him. He took the initiative with us, to be our friend and our savior. He did the seeking and left everything behind to initiate a relationship with each of us. In Revelation, John paints the picture of a polite guest, knocking at our door, inviting us to a banquet with him.

The CrossPointe dinners at the Andersons have put flesh on the bones of my imagination of what a meal with an intimate friend entails. Most of us seem to want to be deeply known, and despite or maybe because of that intimate knowledge, we still also long to be deeply loved. Relationship with one another gives us a small taste of the feast of being known and loved that one day, we will fully experience with Jesus. Since we are followers of Christ, each of us has the Holy Spirit living inside of us. As we live in community with each other, the Spirit in each of us, mutually stirs up each of us to faith and good deeds. The abundance of relationship during our Community Dinners reflect the invitation to an abundant relationship with him.

In these days of the “in-between times” as we wait for Christ’s return, we can give each other the gift of seeking each other out—taking the initiative, and pursue relationship with one another. We can find comfort as we embody Christ to each other.

#### Questions for Reflection:

When was the last time you played hide and go seek or sardines? What did it feel like to be found? What did it feel like to be the one seeking?

Do you remember a time when someone initiated a conversation, a walk, or maybe even lunch? What did it feel like to have someone reach out to you?

Is it difficult for you to ask someone to get coffee with you or (for kids) sit with you at lunch? Why or why not?

Sing your favorite hymns.

Pray for someone from your community.

#### Poem:

*Ready for Silence*, by Madeleine L’Engle

Then hear now the silence  
He comes in the silence  
in silence he enters  
the womb of the bearer  
in silence he goes to  
the realm of the shadows  
redeeming and shriving  
in silence he moves from  
the grave clothes, the dark tomb  
in silence he rises  
ascends to the glory  
leaving his promise  
leaving his comfort  
leaving his silence

So come now Lord Jesus  
Come in your silence  
breaking our noising  
laughter of panic  
breaking this earth's time  
breaking us breaking us  
quickly Lord Jesus  
make no long tarrying

When will you come  
and how will you come  
and will we be ready  
for silence  
your silence

## Week Four:

Longing for Glorification: *The Coming of Christ in The Future*,  
Candle: Hope

### 2 Peter 3:10-15a

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

### Reflection:

"Everything sad will come untrue," *The Jesus Storybook Bible* says at the very end. Jesus is coming back! As Christians, we hope and long for the day of Christ's return. But it's easy for our hope to be misplaced in lesser things: "*I hope my team makes it to the playoffs... I hope I'm invited... or even... I hope I get the new job*". All valid desires, but all longings that will eventually end in disappointment even if we get what we hoped for. Our longings, like channel markers, help us recognize the people or things in which we misplace our hope.

Practicing Advent helps us retrain our desires from lesser things onto the return of Christ. In Advent, we look forward with anticipation to the future, as we place our hope in Christ's return. And the hope we have in God's future rescue, we can also work toward in our present reality.

When Jesus returns, he'll bring Shalom, or the kingdom of God to all the earth. As his image bearers, we can be about his work of ministering to the poor, sick, refugees, and unhoused people—now. Our redemption is a mirror for what God longs to do in the world. This is our mission that Christ gave the church—to break into our present world and bring God's kingdom to earth.

### Questions for Reflection:

As we light the third candle of the Advent wreath, we practice pushing back the darkness as we wait for Christ's return. Pray and ask God to affirm in you that you are created in the *imago Dei*—his image.

As you wait for Christ's return, what might God be doing in you?

As you wait for Christ's return, what might God want to do through you?

Sing your favorite hymns.

Pray for someone from your community.

### Poem:

*Advent Sunday*, by Christina Rossetti

BEHOLD, the Bridegroom cometh: go ye out  
With lighted lamps and garlands round about  
To meet Him in a rapture with a shout.

It may be at the midnight, black as pitch,  
Earth shall cast up her poor, cast up her rich.

It may be at the crowing of the cock  
Earth shall upheave her depth, uproot her rock.

For lo, the Bridegroom fetcheth home the Bride:

His Hands are Hands she knows, she knows His Side.

Like pure Rebekah at the appointed place,  
Veiled, she unveils her face to meet His Face.  
Like great Queen Esther in her triumphing,  
She triumphs in the Presence of her King.  
His Eyes are as a Dove's, and she's Dove-eyed;  
He knows His lovely mirror, sister, Bride.  
He speaks with Dove-voice of exceeding love,  
And she with love-voice of an answering Dove.  
Behold, the Bridegroom cometh: go we out  
With lamps ablaze and garlands round about  
To meet Him in a rapture with a shout.

#### For Further Reading:

*Advent, The Season of Hope*, by Tish Harrison Warren

*Advent: The Once and Future King*, by Fleming Rutledge

*Advent for Everyone: Luke: A Daily Devotional*, by N.T. Wright