

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Advent Season

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Introduction to Advent

Of all the seasons of the church, Advent probably feels the most familiar. Many people, regardless of faith, have used an Advent calendar—the ones with little windows to help you count down the days until Christmas. Yet, even though Advent is certainly about anticipating the coming of the Messiah, what we generally call “Advent” looks pretty different than what the Church historically has called “Advent.”

Formed from a Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival,” Advent is 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.

In American Christianity, we’ve got that first part down. As soon as Thanksgiving is over (and sometimes even before), we start putting up the tree and listening to our favorite Christmas songs. There’s nothing wrong with doing these things, of course, but the whole point of Advent is to spend several weeks—four weeks, to be exact—preparing for Christmas instead of celebrating Christmas.

It’s about stepping into the shoes of the Israelites, longing and crying out for the Messiah to come. It’s about reflecting on our sin and shortcomings and our need for a Savior. It’s about looking around at our broken world and hoping for the second coming of Jesus. And, once we get to Christmas Day, the celebration of Jesus’ birth becomes that much more spectacular and meaningful.

History and Traditions

The Advent season officially begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues until Christmas Day. There are a variety of ways to celebrate the Advent season, depending on tradition and background.

Many people use an Advent wreath made up of five candles to mark the progression of the season. 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 piercing the darkness, we see a picture of the gospel and are reminded of the hopeful yet anxious waiting God’s people experienced as they longed for the promised Savior to come.

God promised a Savior, and He kept that promise perfectly.

About this Guide

Within this guide are four weeks of material that include both a weekly study to complete on your own as well as a Faith at Home plan to help talk about the Advent narrative together with family or friends. Either portion of the guide can also be used to facilitate discussion within your Small 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 world as He proclaims the news of His Son's coming to Joseph. 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. There is much to celebrate.

Personal and Small Group Study

The weekly study includes the passage for the week, a devotional, a set of questions for reflection, a song and a prayer.

The devotionals focus on the particular passage for the week, hitting the major plot points and themes of the story and giving context for interacting with the text. The reflection questions are designed to help us engage the Advent story in personal study and small group discussion..

The song and prayer are meant to be read and sung throughout the week. We've also created an Advent seasonal playlist on Spotify for you to use throughout the season. As you read, sing, and pray week to week, day to day, throughout the day, we believe the Lord will use these rhythms to shape and form you more into the image of the Son.

Faith at Home

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 the story of Jesus doesn't get swallowed up by lesser things.

To help toward that end, we have provided a Faith at Home section each week that will help you create intentional time to talk about Advent. 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.

The Faith@Home section is built around the Faith Kids framework for family discipleship: Faith Talks, Faith Walks, and the Faith Path:

- **Faith Talks** will help you build intentional time into the rhythm of family life for the purpose of thinking about, talking about, and living out the gospel. Be sure to pick up your Advent candle ring and candles to use with the Faith Talk sections of this guide.
- **Faith Walks** are activities or discussions in the course of daily life that turn a child's attention toward the presence and power of God in every part of life.
- **The Faith Path** suggests a focus of specific spiritual disciplines and milestones of God's work in the life of the family and child at certain ages. For more info about where your child is on the Faith Path, go to www.faithfellowshipfortbend.com/faithathome

During this Advent season, consider choosing a specific time during the week to have a family worship or devotional time. As you will see from each of these suggestions and ideas, this really is a simple time and not intimidating. God has not called you as a parent or spouse to necessarily have a church service, but rather to consistently and intentionally communicate the truth and love of Jesus in your family.

For more ideas and resources on leading your family spiritually, check out the Faith@Home Center in the Lobby or go to faithfellowshipfortbend.com/faithaathome

DECEMBER 6

Watching and Waiting

PERSONAL AND SMALL GROUP STUDY

Watching and Waiting

Small groups at Faith Fellowship are designed to provide the context and resources to help every person at Faith Fellowship take their next step as disciples of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step. Consider these questions and ideas before, during and after Small Group to help you take your next step as a disciple.

Passages: Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 9:1-7

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

Interact with the Passages

Read Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 9:1-7 this week by using the H.E.A.R. method before Sunday, December 6. Engaging the text in this way will help you better understand and discuss the Scripture with your small group.

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Feel free to interact with the Scripture at your own pace throughout the week. Remember to interact with the Scripture and think through the discussion questions before you're small group meets. In small groups, we'll discuss what we learned from the Scripture the previous week as well as our answers to the discussion questions together.

Devotional

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.

Watching and Waiting for 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 humanity's rebellion—but instead its redemption.

Reflection Questions

- What stood out to you in your interactions with the Scripture this week or with the sermon.
- 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?
- 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?
- How is Jesus a light for a people walking in darkness? What is the nature of darkness? How does Jesus shine in this dark world?
- What is the significance of the title "Wonderful Counselor?" How does it point to the two great aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry: mighty words and amazing deeds?
- How is Jesus the "Prince of Peace?" Look up Romans 5:1 and Philippians 4:6-7. How do these passages relate?

- 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?

Song for the Week: "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"

Each Sunday we will sing a song that corresponds to the particular section of the Advent story for the week. Additional songs for the season are available on our Advent playlist posted to our Spotify page. We hope and pray these songs encourage you and your family throughout the season.

Prayer

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, came to visit us in great 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 the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

-The Book of Common Prayer

Next Steps for the Week

- **Pray:** Take time each morning to pray for yourself and those around you, asking God to open your eyes and heart to what He has for you this Advent season
- **Consider:** 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?
- **Faith at Home:** Consider the ideas on the next pages to implement practices of family discipleship at home with your family. Family discipleship isn't a one-size-fits all and will look different for each person in this season so use the following Faith at Home section in a way that fits your particular context.

FAITH AT HOME

Watching and Waiting

God calls the family to play a vital role in discipling the next generation. At Faith Fellowship, we encourage you to use the language of Faith Talks, Faith Walks, and the Faith Path as a framework for family discipleship.

Faith Talk

Faith Talks are designated times during the week for your family to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together. 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! In 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 story? 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*” this week. 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.

Faith Walk

Faith Walks are activities or discussions in the course of daily life that turn your families attention toward the presence and power of God in every part of life.

- **Kids: Watching and Waiting**

Parents or grandparents, 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.

DECEMBER 13

God With Us

PERSONAL AND SMALL GROUP STUDY

God with Us

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Passages: Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18-25

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

Isaiah 7:14

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Interact with the Passages

Read Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:18-25 this week by using the H.E.A.R. method before Sunday, September 20. Engaging the text in this way will help you better understand and discuss the Scripture with your small group.

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Feel free to interact with the Scripture at your own pace throughout the week. Remember to interact with the Scripture and think through the discussion questions before your small group meets. In small groups, we'll discuss what we learned from the Scripture the previous week as well as our answers to the discussion questions together.

Devotional

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 Questions

- What stood out to you in your interactions with the Scripture this week or with the sermon.
- Who is the first person you tell when you hear or experience something good?
- What does this passage teach us about Jesus' earthly father, Joseph?
- When the angel appears to Joseph, he gives insight into the meaning of the name "Jesus." What are the two meanings given?
- God reassures Joseph in the midst of uncertainty and doubt. Describe a time when the Lord reassured you with His Word in the midst of difficulty. How did the Word of Truth encourage you toward obedience?
- When Joseph was approached by the angel with the news of Mary's child, he exhibited an incredible openness to God. In what areas might God be calling you to a deeper faith and openness toward His will?
- The virgin birth has been a core belief of orthodox Christianity for 2,000 years. Why do you think this is so? Give your best answer.
- 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?

Song for the Week: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

Each Sunday we will sing a song that corresponds to the particular section of the Advent story for the week. Additional songs for the season are available on our Advent playlist posted to our Spotify page. We hope and pray these songs encourage you and your family throughout the season.

Prayer

Who Adam should have trusted. Who Abraham should have trusted. Who Isaac should have trusted. Who Jacob should have trusted. Who Moses should have trusted. Who David should have trusted. O faithful Lord, who is trustworthy, why did our fathers trust but not trust? Why do we not trust and rest in You?

Forgive me for judging others' failures. Forgive me for answering like a Pharisee. Forgive me for considering others weak. You are great and faithful You are holy and righteous. You are the hope of all who seek You. Yet we languish at the first sweat of faith. We whine at the first delay. We withdraw at the first obstacle. We tire at the first hour. We wander at the first lonely watch. We cry at first pain. O great and faithful Lord. What will it take to believe You? What will it take to rest in You? What will it take to trust when we cannot see You? What will it take to know You are God and we are not?

By faith, help us to choose to Endure when we weary. Resist when tempted. Mature when complacent. Serve when selfish. Be joyful when depressed. O great and faithful Lord, grant to us, not just a miracle, but an immovable faith.

-O Faithful Lord by Michael Easley

Next Steps for the Week

- **Pray:** If you find yourself experiencing bitterness or resistance toward God's promises, ask God to soften your heart and give you the ability to see the goodness of his Word.
- **Consider:** The full Christmas story is a reminder of God's timing and his faithfulness. Which of those do you need to be reminded of this season?
- **Faith at Home:** Consider the ideas on the next pages to implement practices of family discipleship at home with your family. Family discipleship isn't a one-size-fits all and will look different for each person in this season so use the following Faith at Home section in a way that fits your particular context.

FAITH AT HOME

God With Us

God calls the family to play a vital role in discipling the next generation. At Faith Fellowship, we encourage you to use the language of Faith Talks, Faith Walks, and the Faith Path as a framework for family discipleship.

Faith Talk

Faith Talks are designated times during the week for your family to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together. 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 and second candle.

- **Scripture Reading**

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

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

- **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.

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 story? What other attributes of God do you see?

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 "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" this week. 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.

Faith Walk

Faith Walks are activities or discussions in the course of daily life that turn your families attention toward the presence and power of God in every part of life.

- **Movie Night: It's a Wonderful Life**

Make plans to have a movie night with your family one evening this week to watch "It's a Wonderful Life." Be sure to use the Faith at Home Idea Card you received with this Advent Guide to help your family discuss the film.

If you are watching with your kids or grandkids, be up front with them by explaining that you want to watch the film to discuss its themes from a Christian perspective. Don't use this as an occasion to teach, but to enter into good dialogue. You probably won't agree on everything, which is fine. Just discussing the themes can strengthen your relationship and stretch critical thinking skills.

DECEMBER 20

The Promise for All People

PERSONAL STUDY

The Promise For All People

Small groups will not be meeting this week as Christmas draws closer. Consider these questions and ideas for your personal study this week to help you take your next step as a disciple.

Passage: Matthew 2:1-12

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

Interact with the Passages

Read Matthew 2:1-12 this week by using the H.E.A.R. method before Sunday, December 20. Engaging the text in this way will help you better understand and discuss the Scripture with your small group.

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Feel free to interact with the Scripture at your own pace throughout the week. Remember to interact with the Scripture and think through the discussion questions before your small group meets. In small groups, we'll discuss what we learned from the Scripture the previous week as well as our answers to the discussion questions together.

Devotional

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

worshiping 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 Questions

- What stood out to you in the Scripture this week or with the sermon.
- 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?
- 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?
- How should our response to Jesus look like the Magi's response?
- 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.
- 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?

- 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?

Song for the Week: "Joy to the World"

Each Sunday we will sing a song that corresponds to the particular section of the Advent story for the week. Additional songs for the season are available on our Advent playlist posted to our Spotify page. We hope and pray these songs encourage you and your family throughout the season.

Prayer

Lord, Blessed Trinity, to You alone be the glory this day. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank You. I thank You for the grace and mercy of Your wondrous salvation. I have done nothing to deserve such a tremendous gift. Even calling salvation a "tremendous gift" does not encompass the fullness of its beauty and wonder. God, You have sent Jesus, Your only beloved Son, To die on the cross and rise three days later To obtain the salvation that may only be found in Him.

All who receive Jesus, You have given the right To become Your children, O mighty God. You have saved me. Thank You, Lord. But how easily I forget this salvation in my current daily life. How easily I take it for granted and stop at its face value. But Spirit, You have been, and continue to be, Faithful in helping me to see more of this wondrous salvation.

You are saving me. Thank You, Lord. Yet this salvation is also my future guarantee. What I experience right now in part, I will experience later in full This salvation gives me a living, breathing, active hope That is certain as it moves me forward to the life that is to come.

You will save me. Thank You, Lord.

--Book of Prayers (Vol. 2), from The Village Church

Next Steps for the Week

- **Pray:** Ask God to show you how you can reach out to someone who is of a different culture or ethnicity to you Begin praying specifically for individuals in your life who might not share your culture, circumstances, or beliefs.

- **Consider:** 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.
- **Faith at Home:** Consider the ideas on the next pages to implement practices of family discipleship at home with your family. Family discipleship isn't a one-size-fits all and will look different for each person in this season so use the following Faith at Home section in a way that fits your particular context.

FAITH AT HOME

The Promise for All People

God calls the family to play a vital role in discipling the next generation. At Faith Fellowship, we encourage you to use the language of Faith Talks, Faith Walks, and the Faith Path as a framework for family discipleship.

Faith Talk

Faith Talks are designated times during the week for your family to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together. 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 three candles.

• Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

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

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

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

- **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*” this week. 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.

Faith Walk

Faith Walks are activities or discussions in the course of daily life that turn your families attention toward the presence and power of God in every part of life.

- **Around the World**

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.

- **Movie Night: A Christmas Carol**

Make plans to have a movie night with your family one evening this week to watch your favorite version of “*A Christmas Carol*.” Be sure to use the Faith at Home Idea Card you received with this Advent Guide to help your family discuss the film.

If you are watching with your kids or grandkids, be up front with them by explaining that you want to watch the film to discuss its themes from a Christian perspective. Don't use this as an occasion to teach, but to enter into good dialogue. You probably won't agree on everything, which is fine. Just discussing the themes can strengthen your relationship and stretch critical thinking skills.

DECEMBER 27

Return of the King

DECEMBER 27

Return of the King

Small groups will not be meeting this week as we observe Christmas together. Consider these questions and ideas for your personal study this week to help you take your next step as a disciple.

Passages: 2 Peter 3:8-14

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

2 Peter 3:8-14

Interact with the Passages

Read 2 Peter 3:8-14 this week by using the H.E.A.R. method before Sunday, September 20. Engaging the text in this way will help you better understand and discuss the Scripture with your small group.

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Feel free to interact with the Scripture at your own pace throughout the week. Remember to interact with the Scripture and think through the discussion questions before the worship service. The sermon will be from this passage of Scripture you are studying this week.

Devotional

The Promise of Jesus' Return

For many of us, Christmas Day is one of the most important days of the entire year, which is obvious given the intense amount of preparation that often goes into it. We adjust schedules, plans and budgets months in advance. Family members travel in from far away. Decorations are perfectly placed, menus are planned, and gifts are purchased, wrapped and hidden. There is intentionality, joy and anticipation; all because this day is significant. And also because we believe it is a reality.

Christmas isn't a pretend day; it's real. We wouldn't go through all the trouble to prepare if we didn't believe Christmas was, in fact, an actual day. We trust it to come on the same date every year. Out of love and expectation, we make every necessary preparation, so that when it becomes our reality, we are ready.

We spend months preparing to celebrate and remember Christ's first coming. How much more should we seek to be ready for His second coming? That day, too, is a reality; an absolute certainty. Unlike Christmas Day, which happens every December 25, only the Father knows the day and hour His Son will return. But He is coming. In the fullness of time, He will split the sky and descend to destroy all wickedness, receive the worship that is rightfully His

and usher in a new age—the beginning of unbroken, unending fellowship with Him. We should believe in, think about, look to and prepare for that day.

Once More We Wait

The day of Jesus' return is certain and coming, but—so far—it is not today. We find ourselves much like the Israelites long ago—waiting. Which begs the question: How then shall we wait?

Peter asks and answers this very question in his second letter. In love, he reminds his readers that, though the days seem long and weary in the waiting, God is not slow in keeping His promise. He assures them of the absolute reality of the appointed day when Jesus will return. And he then tells them exactly what kinds of lives they are to live in light of this coming day—lives of holiness, godliness and hopeful expectation.

Peter's exhortations are just as much for us today as they were for the believers he wrote to long ago. We too are living in the days of God's patient mercy. We need to be reminded that really believing in and looking toward the reality of Jesus' return changes the way we live. It reorients our hope and perspective. It creates a sense of urgency and sobriety, as well as giddy anticipation—just like a child who cannot wait for Christmas morning.

Let us, the people of God, be found ready in the waiting. As this Advent season comes to a close, take some time to reflect on how the reality of Jesus' return affects the way you live. May your heart be full and your eyes bright as you hope all things in Christ and look to His coming. Take heart, beloved. It won't be long.

Reflection Questions

- Re-read 2 Peter 3:8-14. What stands out to you in this passage and why? What questions does it leave you with?
- What do you think of when you hear or read the words "be diligent"? What does it look like for you to be diligent in pursuing holiness and godliness? In what areas do you need to fight and flee from sin? In what areas do you need to cultivate love for God and love for others?
- Think about the past year. What seasons did you experience? Were they slow or fast-paced? What did you learn about God through them? About yourself?

- Look up Mark 13:32-37. How does the immanence of Christ's return impact how you view what you're doing in the here and now?
- How does the way you structure your life reflect a belief that Jesus really is coming back?
- Look up Romans 8:22-25. Compare it to Revelation 21:1-7. What future birth do we await? How does looking expectantly to the promised return of Jesus affect the way you see your present circumstances?

Song for the Week: "All Glory Be To Christ"

Each Sunday we will sing a song that corresponds to the particular section of the Advent story for the week. Additional songs for the season are available on our Advent playlist posted to our Spotify page. We hope and pray these songs encourage you and your family throughout the season.

Prayer

O Son of God and Son of Man

Thou wast incarnate, didst suffer, rise, ascend for my sake;

Thy departure was not a token of separation but a pledge of return;

Thy Word, promises, sacraments, show thy death until thou come again.

That day is no horror to me,

for thy death has redeemed me,

thy Spirit fills me,

thy love animates me,

thy Word governs me.

I have trusted thee and thou hast not betrayed my trust;

waited for thee, and not waited in vain.

Thou wilt come to raise my body from the dust,

and re-unite it to my soul,

by a wonderful work of infinite power and love,

greater than that which bounds the oceans' waters,

ebbs and flows the tides,

keeps the stars in their courses,

and gives life to all creatures.

This corruptible shall put on incorruption,

this mortal, immortality,

*this natural body, a spiritual body,
this dishonored body, a glorious body,
this weak body, a body of power.*

*I triumph now in thy promises as I shall do in their performance,
for the head cannot live if the members are dead;
Beyond the grave is resurrection, judgment, acquittal, dominion.*

*Every event and circumstance of my life will be
dealt with –
the sins of my youth, my secret sins,
the sins of abusing thee, of disobeying thy Word,
the sins of neglecting ministers' admonitions,
the sins of violating my conscience –
all will be judged;*

*And after judgment, peace and rest, life and service,
employment and enjoyment, for thine elect.*

*O God, keep me in this faith,
and ever looking for Christ's return.*

–“The Second Coming,” from The Valley of Vision

Next Steps for the Week

- **Pray:** Spend some time this week offering up your concerns and anxieties to God about this coming year. Trust that He cares not only for your fears, but also for you yourself.
- **Consider:** If there's a fellow believer in your life struggling today, reach out to them and offer your encouragement by reminding them of God's faithfulness that He is coming again.
- **Faith at Home:** Consider the ideas on the next pages to implement practices of family discipleship at home with your family. Family discipleship isn't a one-size-fits all and will look different for each person in this season so use the following Faith at Home section in a way that fits your particular context.

FAITH AT HOME

Return of the King

God calls the family to play a vital role in discipling the next generation. At Faith Fellowship, we encourage you to use the language of Faith Talks, Faith Walks, and the Faith Path as a framework for family discipleship.

Faith Talk

Faith Talks are designated times during the week for your family to gather for prayer and to study a biblical truth together. 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 all five candles.

- **Scripture Reading**

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

"I am going to show you a secret, John," Jesus said, "about when I come back... Write down what you see so God's children can read it, and wait with happy excitement... I'm on my way," said Jesus. "I'll be there soon."

The Jesus Storybook Bible

"And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Luke 21:27-28

- **Have an adult read the commentary below.**

Jesus came, just like God said He would. But God's promises don't end there. Just like God's people waited with eager anticipation for Jesus to come and rescue them from their sins, we are waiting too. God made us another promise. He promised that Jesus would return to earth. He has already saved us from our sins if we love and trust Him. But when He comes the second time, He will save us from all the brokenness that sin has caused in the world.

Just like before, God has given us hints and clues about how and when Jesus will return. And just like before, we wait. Sometimes we wait patiently. Sometimes we wait with tears and frustration because we can't wait to live in a world without any sin. Sometimes we forget and wonder if Jesus really will come back. But God is faithful—even when we are faithless. And Jesus will come back.

***Ask:** How do you think we should be waiting for Jesus' return? What should we do as we wait?*

This time, Jesus will not come in the middle of the night as a baby. He will not be weak and helpless. The Bible tells us that when Jesus comes back, He will ride out of the sky on a horse, carrying a sword. He will do battle with Satan. And He will win. Our Rescuer is coming back

While we wait, we wait with hope. We live lives of joy, peace and compassion. We strive to be more like Jesus, every day putting sin to death. And we tell others that Jesus came to save sinners in hopes that they will love and trust in Him, too.

Jesus is coming back. We don't know when, but we know He's coming. Soon. So be ready. Soon we will worship our King, as He deserves, forever. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

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?

***Ask:** As we read these verses and remember God's faithfulness to send a Rescuer and His promise that Jesus will come again, what attributes of God do you see?*

- **Prayer**

Have one family member say a prayer, asking Jesus to come again soon.

- **Song**

As a family, sing or listen to *"All Glory Be to Christ"* this week. 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.

Faith Walk

Faith Walks are activities or discussions in the course of daily life that turn your families attention toward the presence and power of God in every part of life.

- **Drawing Board**

As a family, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and talk about what Jesus' return will be like, look like and sound like. What do you learn from this passage? Draw or paint what you think Jesus' return might look like according to these verses.

Spend time outside watching the clouds. After Jesus died and came back to life, He returned to heaven by going up into the clouds. The Bible tells us He will return, coming out of the clouds. Spend time imagining what Jesus' return will look like and pray for Him to come soon.

Scripture for Further Study

Advent is about Christ and His two comings—the first in humiliation, the second in glory; the first in condescension, the second in exaltation; the first for forgiveness, the second for judgment. The passages below speak to the person and work of Jesus in His first coming and the promise of His second.

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.*

Isaiah 11:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 14

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

Colossians 1:15-22

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 1:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:1-5

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Revelation 22:17

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22: 20

Additional Resources for Families

The hope and goal for believing parents in raising their children and grandchildren is to point them to the gospel of Jesus continually in hopes that God will save them. This can seem like an overwhelming task at times. Where do we start? What do we do? How do we point our children to Jesus in the everyday rhythm of life?

To help answer these questions, we ask parents to consider three areas of life as they think about family discipleship: Faith Talks, Faith Walks, and the Faith Path.

Faith Talks will help you build intentional time into the rhythm of family life for the purpose of thinking about, talking about, and living out the gospel.

Faith Walks are activities or discussions in the course of daily life that turn a child's attention toward the presence and power of God in every part of life.

The Faith Path suggests a focus of specific spiritual disciplines and milestones of God's work in the life of the family and child at certain ages. For more info about where your child is on the Faith Path, go to faithfellowshipfortbend.com/faithathome.

In an effort to help families focus on Faith Talks, Faith Walks and the Faith Path during the Advent season, we have given additional activities in each of these areas.

Activities to help you create intentional **Faith Talks**:

- Make a set of Christmas ornaments to remind you of the prophecies of Jesus' birth and their fulfillments.
- 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.
- Make a Christmas card for someone who does not love and trust Jesus. Wish them a merry Christmas and tell them that Jesus came to save sinners!
- Consider a way your family can serve in the community during the Advent season. Here are a few ideas:
 - Adopting an angel and shopping for them together.
 - Visiting an elderly care center and singing carols for the residents.
 - Serving a meal at a homeless assistance shelter.
 - Taking dinner to someone you know who is lonely or in need.

- 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.
- Play hide-and-seek and talk about how Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Thank God for sending Jesus.

Ideas for capturing teachable **Faith Walks:**

- Give hints about Christmas gifts that your children will be receiving to build anticipation in their hearts. Remind them of the "hints" God gives us in Scripture of what Jesus' birth and second coming will be like. There is no greater gift than loving and trusting Jesus!
- Have a kid-friendly nativity set for your children to play with. As they play, retell the Christmas narrative.
- As you're out shopping, look for opportunities to remind your children that all material things are temporary and will ultimately never satisfy them. The only lasting hope is Jesus.
- When you see Christmas lights, talk about which lights and houses are your favorites and why. We are attracted to lights because we are made for the light. Talk with your children about how these lights remind us of Jesus, the best and perfect Light of the World.
- If carolers come to your house, remind your children of the angels who appeared to the shepherds proclaiming the good news of Jesus' birth.

Ways to recognize and remember on **the Faith Path**

- Milestones are significant moments in the life of a family. Not every family will have a milestone to remember this Advent season. If your family does, take time to recognize the work that God is doing in your family and worship Him.
- Celebrating a new family member - If another person joined your family this year, there is much to celebrate. Families grow through the birth or adoption of a child, marriage or taking in a person who needs love and support. Often, when a new person joins a family, they do not have many Christmas ornaments to add to the family tree. Make or purchase a special ornament for your new family member to recognize and remember God's goodness to bring you together.
- First Christmas without a family member - Celebrating can be hard when your family is grieving the loss of a loved one. Take time to help your child remember and talk about that special person if they need to. Help them to remember the good times and

memories they have about that person. If your loved one was a believer, talk about the beautiful reality that they are now with Jesus. Hang an ornament or put out a special decoration that reminds your family of that person. Be honest with God about your sadness and ask Him to make your hearts joyful again.