

INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

The season of Advent has been part of the Christian calendar for centuries. The word 'advent' comes from the Latin *Adventus*, which means 'coming' or 'arrival'. Advent is the season where the church focuses on the 'coming' or 'arrival' of Jesus Christ into the world.

All eyes are therefore on Jesus during Advent. He should always take centre-stage. But during the season of Advent the church especially focuses on Jesus and on His birth into our world.

Over the next month, in the lead-up to Christmas, we are going to **re-trace some of the steps that led to Jesus' birth**. First, we are going to look at a prophecy from the Old Testament that foreshadowed Jesus coming. Second, we are going to address the staggering fact that Jesus' entrance into the world was chosen to be through a family and to come at great inconvenience to the family. Third, we shall see how Jesus' arrival into the world was a gift for all people - irrespective of what class or culture they come from. Finally, we examine the tremendous power God exerted to cause people to properly worship Jesus at His birth.

Each Sunday you will receive a page of Advent thoughts. The idea is meditation. As a church we are all going to focus and meditate on the key steps in the story of Jesus' birth - the First Christmas. We are going to **prepare our hearts and our minds and our spirits** in the build-up to Christmas by concentrating on the ultimate Christmas gift: the arrival of God our Saviour in human form.

Each devotion will begin with a relevant Bible passage. This is arguably the most important part as we train our attention on the Truth of Christmas as revealed in the Word of God. Take your time to read the Bible passages. **Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you.** Ask God to highlight to you things that you may have never noticed in the Bible text. Take a fresh look at them. Don't get caught into thinking that you have heard it all before. Try to read the Bible passages as if for the first time.



What follows the Bible passage is a short write-up of a dialogue between two people. This is a creative way to stimulate us toward thinking about some of **the deeper layers of the Christmas story**. Following the dialogue will be a few questions for your reflection. After that will be some suggestions for practical things you can actually do to put action to the truths discussed. Finally, we have compiled Spotify playlists for your enjoyment and to help you get into the swing of the Jesus birth story.

We trust that these short devotionals will **raise your anticipation for Christmas** and throw fresh light and revelation on its meaning. We hope that as we count down the weeks to Christmas, like a traditional Advent Calendar would do, your appreciation for the miracle of God's salvation through the God-man, Jesus Christ, will increase. As you finish 2018 we ask you to cast your mind on Jesus' finished work: the salvation He accomplished on the Cross and Resurrection. **Be stirred again that our Saviour came into the world as a tiny baby to save our souls.**

It is the greatest story ever told. We hope you enjoy the re-telling of it.

SOMETHING TO DO

Here are some suggestions for practical things you can do during this Advent season

- Actively plan for moments of pause and meditation during the week.
- Commit to reading through the book of Luke with a friend.
- Consider praying through the daily devotional: *Come, Let Us Adore Him* by Paul Tripp.
- Consider reading a book from this list: tinyurl.com/RHCadventBooks
- Consider doing a family Advent Calendar (for kids) from this list: tinyurl.com/RHCadventKids

SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO

Each week, a playlist of songs have been selected to help us meditate and respond to the truths we have heard.

Go to tinyurl.com/RHCspotify25Nov to listen to this week's playlist.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL #1: THE GIFT OF A KING

SOMETHING TO READ

Isaiah 9.1-7

¹ 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. 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. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ 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 Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** ⁷ 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.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Here is a dialogue between two people discussing the Christmas story. What do you think about their conversation?

"He was very good-looking. Especially in uniform."

Vanessa's grandmother loved telling her the story of Christmas 1944.

*"We were engaged to be married when your grandfather left for the war. He used to write these beautiful letters. All through the war, he'd write. A letter meant that he was still alive. And then one day I got the best letter of all. It was short. All it said was: 'Our battalion's been discharged. I'll be coming home. Soon. Expect me!' It took another 6 months. The longest 6 months of my life. Every morning I'd wake up: 'Could this be the day that he comes back?' Every morning I thought '**Today the darkness becomes light! Today the promise comes true!**'"*

*"And then he came. He arrived on Christmas morning, 1944. We were married by New Year's Eve." The old lady's eyes glistened. "But a 6 month wait is nothing," she said, turning to Vanessa. "Just think how long it took for Christmas to come for Isaiah's listeners! 750 years! That's how long they had to wait for the first Christmas from Isaiah's prophecy. Those people were walking in darkness. It was deep darkness. And gloom. **But Isaiah said that God was going to come to them.**"*

"Like God was saying through Isaiah that the cheque was in the mail," Vanessa suggested.

"Exactly! But this was no ordinary cheque. It was God Himself. Wonderful Counsellor! Mighty God! Everlasting Father! Prince of Peace!"

"And yet He came as a baby," Vanessa thought out loud.

"To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder."

“A tiny baby. As powerful as the government. Like those infant Chinese Emperors?”

*“O, much more powerful than that, dear,” Vanessa’s grandmother said. “Of the increase of his government there will be no end. The promised child would reign on David’s throne. **It would be an international kingdom. And it would span all time.**”*

“But they’d have to wait 750 years for it,” said Vanessa.

“It was worth the wait,” the old lady continued. “The baby was going to be a great light. He was going to increase their joy and bring multiplication. His birth would cause rejoicing like when someone gets an annual bonus way bigger than expected. But best of all—”

The old lady paused. **“—Best of all, the coming of the child meant the end of the war. The child would break the yoke of the enemy. This baby would shatter the rod of the oppressor. The soldiers would burn their uniforms and get rid of their weapons. There would be feasting. Lots of feasting as they divided up the spoils of war. Victory! The baby was going to bring victory.**

*“I had to wait a whole war for your grandfather. Then I got a husband out of it. **Isaiah’s people had to wait 750 years. But then they got a victorious king out of it.** That’s some gift. No wonder people have been giving gifts to each other, every Christmas, ever since.”*

SOMETHING TO RESPOND TO

Here are some questions to help you meditate on the Christmas story:

- How grateful are you that Jesus came? Tell the Lord.
- Do you connect Christmas with Jesus as a mighty King ruling over the nations?
- Jesus has won the war against sin. What does it mean for your life that Jesus is victorious against sin?
- Isaiah’s role was to introduce Jesus. Is there anyone you need to introduce Jesus to?
- Does your level of *gratitude* for Jesus’ coming match the level of *anticipation* the people had for the Messiah in Isaiah’s time?

SOMETHING TO DO

Here are some suggestions for practical things you can do during this Advent season:

- Make a gratitude wall. Write post-it notes thanking God for sending Jesus, telling Him how His gift has impacted your life.
- Consider writing out your journey of how Jesus brought you out of darkness into light. Share this with a friend to encourage them in their faith.
- Write a meaningful snail mail letter to a friend. Tell them a letter is coming for them, and use the week to build anticipation in the same way God’s people had to wait for their Saviour.
- Pray for a friend or family member who does not yet know Jesus. Invite them to our Christmas Eve event using one of our ticket invitations!
- Organise a group to help our ReadAble kids & families prepare for the next year. See more info here: tinyurl.com/RHCreadable
- Consider reading a book from these list: tinyurl.com/RHCadventBooks
- Consider these books, movies, and activities for kids: tinyurl.com/RHCadventKids

SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO

Here is a playlist of songs to help you respond to the truths we have heard:

Go to tinyurl.com/RHCspotify2Dec to listen to this week’s playlist.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL #2: THE GIFT OF INCLUSION

SOMETHING TO READ

Matthew 1.18-25

¹⁸ 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.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Here is a dialogue between two people discussing the Christmas story. What do you think about their conversation?

"I don't want to be in the end of year Christmas play," Wei Ping protested. "I'm 10 years old and I am far too old to be in some church play."

"But you are the lead character," Wei Ping's mother counter-argued. "Who else is going to be the Virgin Mary?"

"Someone else can."

"What don't you like about the play?"

"It's so predictable. Everyone knows the Virgin has a baby. It's not like there's a twist in the plot or something."

"**It is the greatest story ever told,**" the mother replied.

"And anyway, why did Mary have to be a virgin? What's the big deal?"

"Good question. Firstly, it was a fulfilment of a prophecy from Isaiah. Secondly, a virgin having a child is an impossibility. **It's a proof that Jesus is God.** Think about it, if you were going to trick people that you were the Messiah, you'd have to arrange for your own birth to be through a virgin!"

"I suppose it's pretty hard to determine where and when you get born."

"But there's a better reason. God needed to be Jesus' Father—not some ordinary man."

"What do you mean?"

"**To be the saviour of the world Jesus had to be both man and God at the same time.**"

"So one parent had to be human and the other parent had to be God?"

"Yes. To pay for the sins of the world on the Cross, Jesus had to be fully man. It had to be a human life to pay for a human life."

"**Because it was a sacrifice.**"

"Exactly! But here's the thing. Every human on earth has come from the line of Adam. Adam had this thing called 'original sin' that got passed down the line. So every human is born with 'original sin'. We are all tainted with it."

"But if Jesus came from a virgin He would be a human. But not come from the line of Adam. He'd be pure."

"You've got it! Jesus would start a new line. He'd be like a new Adam. A human. But a Second Adam."

"He'd be the perfect saviour. Totally human. Yet holy from God. Not carrying Adam's original sin."

"Mary had to put up with a lot of inconvenience to be the virgin mother. She was just minding her own business. She was planning her wedding. She was Googling locations for the engagement photos. And then suddenly—the Holy Spirit gave her a baby!"

"She was an unmarried teenager. She must have been a scandal!"

"But just think what Mary received. *She was part of giving the greatest gift the world has ever known. Through her, Jesus died for the sins of the world. And the gift she gave became a gift she received. Mary got her own sins forgiven too. Jesus died for her sins too."*

"Jesus loves to include people into His family. *It's amazing that it all started with Jesus having to be included into someone else's family."*

"God loves families. He used a family to bring Jesus into the world. And He used Jesus to bring us into His heavenly family."

SOMETHING TO RESPOND TO

Here are some questions to help you meditate on the Christmas story:

- Try to imagine the inconvenience Mary's pregnancy of Jesus brought her. How would you have felt if you were Mary?
- What does it tell us about God that He chose for Jesus to come to earth through a family?
- What did Jesus do that made it possible for us to be included into God's family?
- To what level of inconvenience do you go to include other people into God's things?
- Is there anyone you can give the gift of inclusion to?

SOMETHING TO DO

Here are some suggestions for practical things you can do during this Advent season:

- Pray about the "imposition" of reaching out to someone you do not know in our church and taking them out for a meal.
- Consider ways you can make Sundays more hospitable for those on the fringes by coming early to service and befriending them.
- Children, who is the kid who is left out or gets made fun of? What can we do to accept them just as they are?
- Our Mercy & Justice team is organising a Christmas concert for the Yong-En Dementia Care Centre. Sign up to sing with us on 21 December. See here for more info: tinyurl.com/RHCyongen
- Consider reading a book from this list: tinyurl.com/RHCadventBooks

SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO

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Go to tinyurl.com/RHCspotify9Dec to listen to this week's playlist.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL #3: THE GIFT TO THE WORLD

SOMETHING TO READ

Luke 2.8-20

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.** ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ **But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.** ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Here is a dialogue between two people discussing the Christmas story. What do you think about their conversation?

"I got a letter from the school today."

There was slight hesitation in her voice as she continued: *"Daphne's class has the annual camp."*

"How much?" That was often his first response as a husband.

"More than we have."

"It's a bad month."

"I know. The hospital hasn't helped. And all the follow-up medicine."

"Don't forget we're supporting your sister and Papa."

"I know you want us to borrow from that man. I just don't think a loan is our answer." She said it softly.

"Where else are we going to get it from then? It's not like we can borrow it from God!"

"You know that God loves us and understands."

"It feels like God has forgotten us."

"How can God forget us?" she whispered. *"Can't you remember the story of the First Christmas? God chose for Jesus to be in a poor family. Jesus grew up poor."*

"Sometimes I feel that Christianity only remembers the wealthy."

"That's not true. God made the announcement of Jesus' birth to the lowest economic class. He announced it to the shepherds. Shepherds were the working poor of the time. God bypassed rich Herod in the palace. He gave the scoop to the poor shepherds."

"It's not like God gave the poor shepherds cash."

"They got something better. They got an experience of God. They saw one angel. Then they saw a multitude of angels. They heard the angels singing. They got a message from God. They got God's gift of peace. They heard God's pleasure over them and over all the people. They

received great joy. God's blessings are often more than just cash."

"That's them. They got lucky. God remembered them."

"But that's the thing. **It's a story that God remembers everyone.** The message the angels brought was to be **for all the people.** The shepherds probably felt forgotten. They were forgotten out in the Judean countryside. Everyone else was registering for the Roman census (which Mary and Joseph had travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem for). They weren't even a statistic in the Romans' eyes! But God didn't forget them. **The good news of great joy was for all the people.** God doesn't want anyone to be forgotten on account of economic status."

"It is comforting knowing that God chose the cash-strapped to hear the news first. There's so much economic inequality in the world today. It's nice knowing Christianity has a place for everyone."

"You think the inequality gap in Singapore is bad—the so-called Gini Coefficient. But think about the Gini Coefficient between God and humans! The inequality between God and us is vast. It's a chasm too vast to cross. And yet, Jesus left His riches to come to us as a poor man. **Even though He was a king He chose to exchange places with all of us who are morally bankrupt.** He bridged the gap."

"I guess I should try to focus more this Christmas on celebrating the riches of Christ's salvation that I have."

"It says that Mary treasured in her heart the shepherds' message."

"The wise men brought physical treasure."

"**But the greater treasure is in the heart.** We're going to heaven. That's some treasure."

SOMETHING TO RESPOND TO

Here are some questions to help you meditate on the Christmas story:

- What does it mean to you that Christianity is for all people?
- What is the significance to you that God loves the poor? How does this impact you?
- How can you connect Christmas to people in society who are vulnerable or 'forgotten'?
- In what ways are all of us 'broke'?

SOMETHING TO DO

Here are some suggestions for practical things you can do during this Advent season:

- Put together a Christmas goodie bag for the security guards and cleaners at your workplace and neighbourhood.
- Go on a prayer walk in your neighbourhood and ask God to give you opportunities to encounter those who are unseen and vulnerable, and to care for them. If you live in the Jalan Kukoh area, here is a prayer walk guide you may use: tinyurl.com/JalanKukohPrayer
- Pray about who you can share your faith with this week.
- Consider responding to these truths we've been learning by singing Christmas carols with a group of friends and family around your neighbourhood.
- Think of people in your life who do not yet believe in Jesus. Tell them about advent and invite them to our Christmas Eve event!
- Consider reading a book from this list: tinyurl.com/RHCadventBooks

SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO

Here is a playlist of songs to help you respond to the truths we have heard:

Go to tinyurl.com/RHCspotify16Dec to listen to this week's playlist.

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL #4: THE GIFT OF WORSHIP

SOMETHING TO READ

Matthew 2.1-12

¹ 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, ² 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.**" ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ "'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.'" ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ **When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.** ¹¹ 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. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Here is a dialogue between two people discussing the Christmas story. What do you think about their conversation?

"When was the last time you heard from him?"

"As a matter of fact, I actually spoke to him last week. I called him up. Randomly. Out of the blue."

"How is he doing?"

"The work in Japan is difficult. It's hard ground for the Christian message there, I think. He's been there a couple of years now. The church plant is still small. There's not too much fruit. It's qualitative, not necessarily quantitative."

"I admire his courage and endurance. He's always so upbeat."

*"I know what you mean. I actually said to him on the phone last week: **'What's the secret of your great faith?—you know, to just keep going and going, sowing the seed year after year.'**"*

"And what did he say the secret to his faith was?"

"He said that whenever he's discouraged he thinks of the wise men in Matthew 2."

"What a bizarre source of encouragement!"

*"He said something profound. He said that it's one of the finest examples in the Bible of Jesus' drawing power. Or, to use his phrase, **the 'irresistible gravity' of Jesus.**"*

"What?"

"He explained it like this: Jesus made the planets bend. He was born, and rich scholars from Arabia or Persia or somewhere noticed this disruption in the heavenly bodies. Whether it was a new star or Jupiter and Saturn aligning—who knows? And this 'star' guided them for hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to the very town and the very house Jesus was in."

"That's some gravitational pull—disrupting the course of heavenly bodies and drawing people great distances. I like it."

"And not just anyone—Gentile academics. Seemingly the most unlikely candidates for conversion."

*"And these wise men see Jesus as a baby. **He's just like any other small child. Yet they offer Him these extravagant gifts—**"*

"—It's not like they offered King Herod their gifts when they met him."

"Exactly. And the choice of gifts is completely incredible. They totally had a revelation about who Jesus really was. Gold: a gift appropriate for a king. Frankincense: the very symbol of a high priest. Myrrh: the stuff used to embalm the dead. A king. A priest. A death."

"The king; the priest; the child given to die for the world."

"And they fell down and worshiped Jesus."

*"I can see why that is so encouraging to a church planter in Japan. If Jesus can draw Gentiles for miles across a desert to fall prostrate in worship before God as a baby, **then He can draw anyone, anywhere, anyhow.**"*

"And to this very day Jesus is still drawing people to worship Him. One day in heaven the Persian wise men will be offering gifts of worship to Jesus. Next to them will be people from Japan—doing exactly the same."

*"You know, when you put it like that, it makes me reconsider what a Christmas present is. **It's actually a gift of worship to Jesus Himself.**"*

"And all because we got a Christmas present first. The original Christmas present is Jesus' gift of Himself to us."

SOMETHING TO RESPOND TO

Here are some questions to help you meditate on the Christmas story:

- Do you believe that God wants to draw people to Jesus from cultures other than your own?
- How can you be a 'star' that guides people to Jesus?
- With what gifts are you going to worship Jesus this Christmas? Would it be a thing? Is it a part of your heart or a behaviour you are holding onto and don't want to give up? How can you worship God in a new way this Christmas?

SOMETHING TO DO

Here are some suggestions for practical things you can do during this Advent season:

- Prepare your hearts to come and adore Jesus at our Christmas Eve event tomorrow.
- Commit to reading God's Word as your daily act of worship. See here for reading plan ideas: tinyurl.com/RHCbibleplans
- Consider hosting a meal at your home. Radical hospitality begins by seeing our homes as God's gift to use for the furtherance of his kingdom.
- Invite someone to take part in your family or cultural Christmas traditions.
- Plan how you will worship Jesus next year with your time, commitment, finances, and service.
- Consider reading a book from this list: tinyurl.com/RHCadventBooks

SOMETHING TO LISTEN TO

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