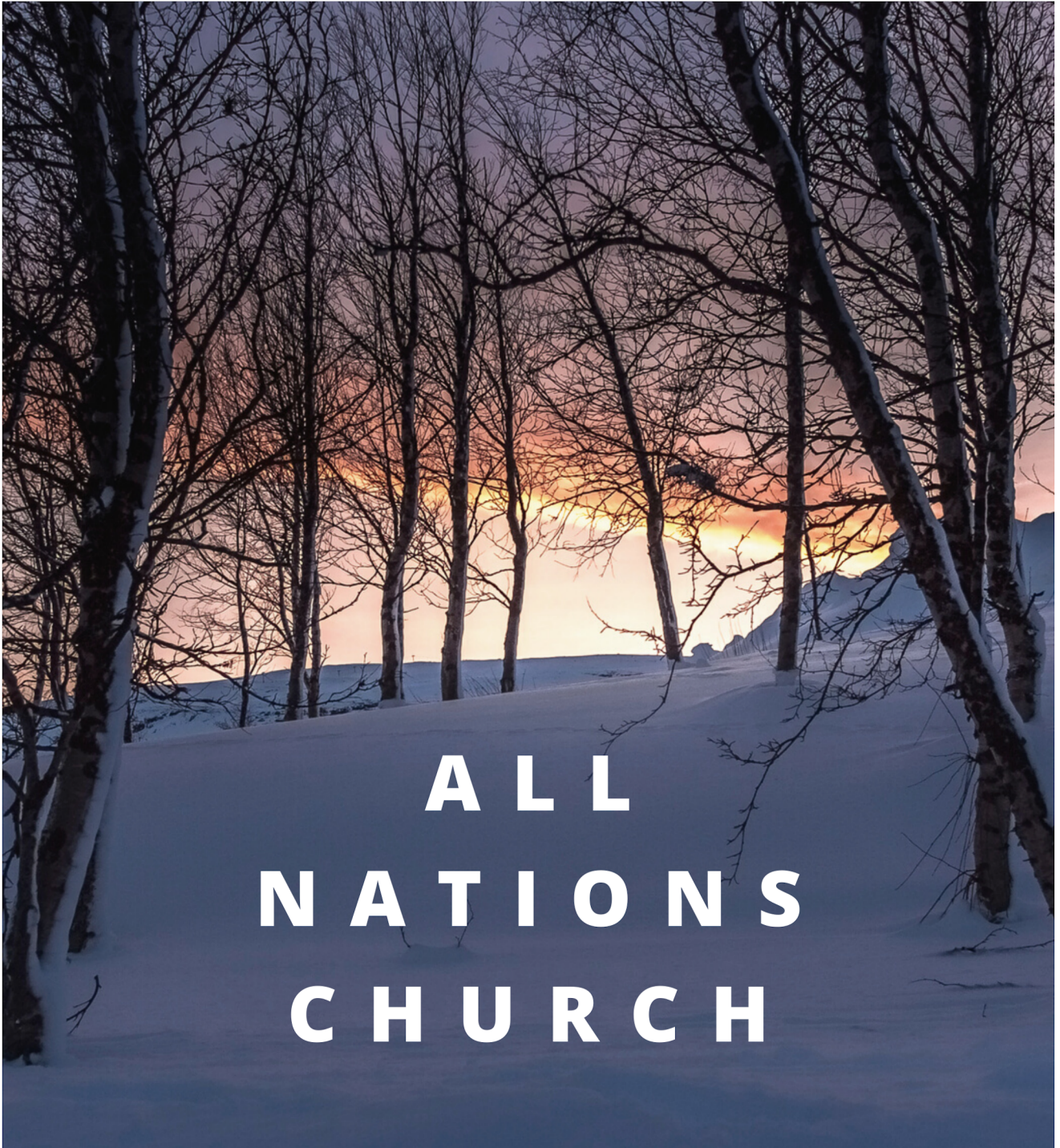


2022

Advent

ALL NATIONS CHURCH



ALL
NATIONS
CHURCH



*Christ has come,
Christ will come again*

ADVENT STUDY 2022

Advent is a season in which we celebrate that Christ has come and in which anticipate that Christ will come again. We put ourselves in the position of Israel, a people walking in darkness waiting for their light to shine, and, at the same time, we are reminded that we are a people who still, in so many ways, walk in darkness and long for the light to shine in our lives and in our world. We find ourselves living in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet”.

This study follows four passages from Old Testament prophets which we will read in worship this year as we light the Advent candles. These passages proclaim the messiah and the promises already fulfilled even as they also point to what is still yet to come. They invite us to enter the experience of Israel awaiting its messiah so that we might rejoice in the Good News of Christ, but they also teach us to wait patiently for Christ to come and make all things new.



ANCL
Advent
2022

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Preparation

WEEK ONE

Isaiah 2:1-5



1 This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

2 In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.
3 Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

5 Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

During Advent, Christians turn their attention to the prophets - especially those that announce the coming Messiah. Advent invites us to recall a time before Christ had arrived, a time in which people longed for deliverance, a time when the world was not as it should be. By imagining the time before the light of Christ shone in the darkness, we can experience afresh the joy of Christ entering the world in Bethlehem, the joy of Christ entering our lives here and now. The prophets remind us of the expectations that preceded Jesus, and all the hopes he fulfilled. This child makes all things new.

As important as the prophets are, it's the Gospels that take center stage during Advent. At no other time do we focus so intently on stories of Jesus' life. I think one of the reasons we love Advent and Christmas is because it is a time of storytelling. We love stories, and we learn from them. Perhaps surprisingly, Christians have long begun Advent by focusing - not on the story of Jesus' birth - but on the very end of his ministry, on the passages where Jesus speaks of the end of the world and his second coming. And this is no accident. As we remember Christ's coming we are invited to look forward to his coming again.

So we find ourselves in a similar place to the prophets: preparing for Christ to come (again). And when we read the prophets we also see that - though we live on the other side of Christ's coming - in many ways we still have the same longings as those who lived so long ago. We might wonder how much has really changed? We still live in a world of darkness into which the light needs to shine.

Christians believe that most important events in all history have already taken place in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And though that decisive victory has been won, in this life, the powers of sin and death still hold; we still need a savior. In the hope of the prophets - a hope that was not met for centuries to come - we learn to be people of hope. We learn to trust that God has not forgotten his promises, we learn to wait with patient expectation, and to prepare the way of the Lord who has come and will come again.

We live in a world in which the mountain of the Lord's house does not appear to be established as the highest but even seems to be eroding. The nations are not streaming to it, the people do not seek to be taught his ways or to walk in his paths. The situation, it seems, is getting worse, not better. How long, O Lord!? At times, despair comes more easily than hope. Advent reminds us that hope - though not easy - never disappoints. And so Isaiah even calls us to imagine the day when people take their weapons and transform them into farming implements.

Preparation
WEEK ONE



Preparation

WEEK ONE
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

To what extent have these things Isaiah prophesied already been fulfilled?
And for what do we still wait? Do you hope for these things?

Is it our role to help fulfill these prophecies? Or can only God make them
come true?

How is Christ's second coming like (and different from) his first?

Is Christ's return Good News? For everyone?

What are some ways that we can prepare ourselves and prepare for the
world for Christ's coming?

Hope

WEEK TWO



Isaiah 11:1-10

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

*2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord*

*3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;*

*4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.*

*He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*

*5 Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

*6 The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.*

*7 The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

*8 The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.*

*9 They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.*

*10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples;
the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

This passage paints a picture almost too wonderful to believe. There will come from the “stump of Jesse” a “branch” that will bear much fruit, and upon this one will rest the Spirit of the Lord. He will bring justice and righteousness, peace and rest.

But then it goes even further. Not only will human relationships and politics get sorted out, the whole created order will be reordered: The wolf and the lamb will live in peace, the lion and the calf will together be lead by a child, the cow and the bear will with their children play together, the cobras and vipers will be no threat to young children, the lion will become a vegetarian(!), and all will be as God intended because “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord”. Everything will be transformed! This is what John saw in Revelation when he said “then I saw a new heaven and a new earth!” (21:1) The kingdom of God really will come on Earth as it is in heaven, and this begins - and ends - in Jesus.

The prophets teach us to hope that all things will be made new. And it really means all things, all the way down to making new the very nature of animals. They will live in peace as God intended, and if their natures can be changed, how much more for us who are made in the image of God!? God’s good purposes established in the Garden, then damaged by sin, will be renewed, redeemed, and restored. We are taught to hope, not just that we one day leave the world and go to heaven, not that God will save us while everything else falls apart, but that God really will make all things new, that all will be as God intended.

This seems almost too much to hope for. Isaiah prophesied this long ago and yet it seems no closer now than ever. As we live in a world of division and hostility, dare we hope that all will one day be at peace? When see all that is broken in the world, in our relationships, in our own lives, can we manage to hope that God will pick up all the pieces and put them back together as they belong?

During Advent the prophets remind us that we have not hoped for too much. We have hoped for too little.

Hope
WEEK TWO



Hope

WEEK TWO
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How does having to wait affect hope? What else makes hope difficult?

Does this picture in Isaiah seem almost too hopeful? Is it hard to believe this vision will be realized?

What is that you hope for most? What do wish would come true? Do your hopes resemble what Isaiah teaches us to hope for?

What does this passage teach us about the content of Christian hope?

What is God ultimate goal when all is finished?

What will it look like when Christ returns? What do these prophecies tell us about eternal life?

Is it our job to make these hopes become a reality?

Joy

WEEK THREE

Isaiah 35:1-10

1 The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus,

2 it will burst into bloom;

it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;

they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

3 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;

4 say to those with fearful hearts,

“Be strong, do not fear;

your God will come,

he will come with vengeance;

with divine retribution

he will come to save you.”

5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

8 And a highway will be there;

it will be called the Way of Holiness;

it will be for those who walk on that Way.

The unclean will not journey on it;

wicked fools will not go about on it.

9 No lion will be there,

nor any ravenous beast;

they will not be found there.

But only the redeemed will walk there,

10 and those the Lord has rescued will return.

They will enter Zion with singing;

everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them,

and sorrow and sighing will flee away.





Joy

WEEK THREE
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is joy? Do you have joy? Do you think you're more often happy, or joyful? What makes joy difficult to have and keep? What brings you joy?

What does it mean for the earth to rejoice?

Do you think of these prophecies more metaphorically or more literally? That is, when it speaks of the desert blossoming, is this the real, earthly desert, or rather does it mean something like "the dry places in our lives"? (Here again, though you might want to say "both", be honest.)

Does God intend to redeem only humans or all of creation? What is included in "All"?

Do you ever become frustrated or impatient that these old prophecies are still unfulfilled? Would you like to see these things coming true? Or, perhaps, where do we see them coming true?

How can we have joy here and now based on something that we haven't seen that we're promised is coming in the future?

One of the most popular Christmas carols proclaims, "Joy to the World, the Lord is come! Let Earth receive her king!" And indeed, the coming of Jesus is good news for the whole world, for all of creation. So we read in Isaiah that the desert will flower, the wilderness will flourish and bear witness to the glory of God. Waters will break forth and the burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground will become bubbling springs. What was dead will come to life! The earth itself rejoices!

We live in cold, rainy Luxembourg, but for those literally living in the desert, this would've been a deeply resonate image. It provided them - and us - a glimpse of the Good News that is to come to us, to the world. We see one picture of what it means when Jesus declares, "Behold, I make ALL things new." Once more we are reminded that the Jesus's coming does not just affect the spiritual/invisible but all the visible, material creation.

But it is hard for us to take joy because we do not always see these visions coming true in our world, in our lives. Again, we live in the times between the times, the time between when Jesus's incarnation, death, and resurrection has changed everything, and the time when this change takes full effect, in the last days, when the king comes again in final victory to establish his reign. We live in the already/not yet. We trust that he has come and that he will come again, but finally we walk by faith, not by sight. We are to maintain our hope that the Lord's peace is indeed coming, and so we take joy in what has begun, and in what is to come.

Christians have long distinguished joy from happiness. Happiness comes and goes depending on the circumstances, but joy abides. When assailed by the powers of sin and death, we may rightly refuse happiness, but we should still be joyful. Christians see that joy is founded upon the hope of the peace to come, a joy that allows us to live as if it is indeed already here.

One day, the weak will be made strong, blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap like a deer, the mute will sing for joy. God, in Christ, will redeem all creation, but God, who in Christ took human form, takes particular interest in humans created in His image. All of our brokenness will be taken up and transformed, all wholeness and goodness restored:

*Those the Lord has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

Luke tells us this story of when Jesus entered Jerusalem:

19:37 "When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"[b]

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Love

WEEK FOUR



Isaiah 7:10-16

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." 13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

We all want to know that we are loved. And we don't only want to hear it; we want to see visible signs that it is indeed true.

Even though we want signs, but God often seems ambivalent about providing them. In the passage above, the Lord tells Ahaz to request a sign, but Ahaz refuses; he does not want to seem to be testing God. In the Gospels Jesus does perform signs, but he never does them on demand, and - surprisingly - he often tells those who saw the sign not to tell others. It seems that signs can be a distraction from God as much as they point to God.

But then the Lord does promise, through Isaiah, that he will provide a sign: A child shall be born, a son called Immanuel, "God is with us". And just to state the obvious, Christians believe that this son is Jesus, that in him God really is with us.

Ultimately God proves his love not by granting some of our wishes - a capricious ruler might be expected to do the same - but by giving himself to us. And this is true not just in the sense that Christ is a gift that God gives to us. More than that, we believe that God in Jesus and comes to us as one of us, that God doesn't show his love from afar but by coming near, as near as can be. This is what love does. It doesn't just show a sign; it is an embodied presence actively demonstrating that love. Love closes the distance, the one loves goes to the beloved. This is the mystery of the incarnation. This is how God shows his love.



Love

WEEK FOUR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is your “love language”? How do you most want to receive love? How do you show love?

Why do we want signs? And why does God often seem ambivalent about providing signs?

Is Jesus a sign of God’s love? Or is he more than a sign?

How can we make love “incarnate”? Who are the people to whom you need to draw near? What are the barriers between yourself and others that you can overcome?

Do love and humility always go together?



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