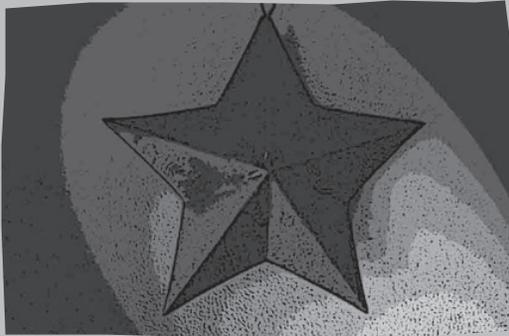


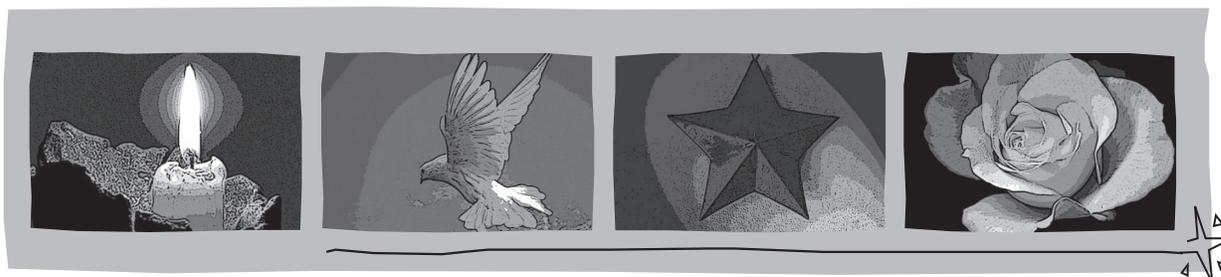


Advent

Celebrating the Coming of our Lord



**Santa Barbara Community Church
December 2012**



An Introduction to Advent

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman... to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Galatians 4:4-7

At the heart of the Christian story is the drama of Advent, the wonder of Christmas. We believe that God himself became one of us. Little baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem, was God in flesh. He came, lived and died so that we might truly live. And never die. He came so that we might become children of God and thus enjoy God forever!

Advent is a season in the church calendar that looks back to what theologians call *the incarnation of Jesus*. The second person of the triune God became a man, but before that, a baby, and before that, a *fetus* inside his mother's womb.

The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning *coming* or *arrival*. The word is deliberately ambiguous. On the one hand, we celebrate the first advent of Jesus, his birth in Israel. Yet we also focus on the second advent, or coming, of Jesus when he will rule and reign on earth as he already rules and reigns in heaven.

The celebration of Advent is not a biblical mandate, but rather a helpful reminder of *who* we are and *whose* we are. The Apostle Paul tells us we have been *bought with a price* by this Jesus who became a baby and was born in Bethlehem (1 Corinthians 6:20). Advent begins to explain how high a price Jesus paid for our purchase.



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Celebration, Anticipation, Self-Examination

Advent is a time of *celebration*. God became one of us! Celebrate! Jesus came that we might be reconciled with our heavenly Father. Celebrate! He was born in a faraway land into the humblest of circumstances for the express purpose of redeeming the world from sin and reconciling humanity to himself. Celebrate! Jesus was born, ultimately, so that he might die on a cross and become accursed for our sins and in our place. Celebrate! This same Jesus was raised from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). Celebrate!

The Advent season is also a time of *anticipation*. The Old Testament prophets, with eager anticipation, foretold the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, their visions and signs were confirmed in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Advent is a time of longing and hope as we prepare our hearts for the Second Coming of our Lord.

As we stand between the ages, between the First and the Second Advent of our Lord, this season should also be a time of *self-examination*. We are called to reflect upon our relationship with the Lord and his mighty and merciful presence in our lives. It is a time to prepare ourselves for his glorious return to judge the quick [living] and the dead.

Hope, Peace, Joy, Love

The Advent season is filled with meaningful symbolism. We will be celebrating each week by the lighting of the Advent wreath. For each of the four weeks of Advent there will be four corresponding candles on the wreath. Three of the candles are purple, the royal color of our King, and one of the candles is rose-colored, representing joy in anticipation of his coming. This change in color “marks a shift from the more solemn tone of the first two Sundays of Advent that focus on Preparation and Hope, to a more joyous atmosphere of anticipation and expectancy.”¹ Each candle represents a biblical theme. This Advent season will follow the themes of **hope, peace, joy, and love**. In the center of the wreath will be a fifth candle, the Christ candle, which we will light on Christmas Eve to mark the Messiah’s arrival. Christ came that we might experience these wonderful benefits of the cross. Yet we wait in eager anticipation for the full realization of the hope, peace, joy, and love that he offers. Therefore, let us not only say *Merry Christmas*, but may we cry *Maranatha, Lord come quickly!*

1 <http://www.cresourcei.org/cyadvent.html>.



A Note on This Advent Study¹

At the conclusion of Luke's Gospel the resurrected Jesus says something that ties the whole Bible together. While walking on a road to the town Emmaus, Jesus tells two fellow travelers that the whole Bible is about him (Luke 24:26-27). As they walked toward their destination Jesus *interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*.

In a sense, this is the approach we will take as a church during this season of Advent. We are going to glean from four wide-reaching views of the Scriptures and see what they teach us about the one who came to Bethlehem. Be forewarned. You'll need to put on your safety-belt as we fly high over the landscape of biblical history. Hopefully this view of the big picture will allow us to celebrate the details more enthusiastically, especially the detail of the coming of the Christ child.

This year we will be discussing the first two weeks of Advent after the teaching on the previous Sunday. What follows are two studies intended for homegroup use and two studies for personal reflection. Unlike other studies we have written, these are, to some extent, *sermon notes*, with some questions clustered at the beginning. The hope is that together, as a church community, we will *come to Bethlehem and see, Christ the Lord, the newborn king!* Praise!

¹ Studies 1 and 3 were written by Reed Jolley, Study 2 was written by Mike Willbanks, and Study 4 was written by Steve Jolley. Artwork and graphic design by Carolee Peterson.



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Week 1 Hope: A Tale of Five Temples



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

As a homegroup, reflect on the teaching from last Sunday. Consider the sermon notes beginning on page six to help you reflect on hope and Advent.

What main point did you receive from Sunday's teaching? What did you learn about God and his greatness from Sunday's teaching?

How does the tale of five temples give you hope?

Explain how this tale of five temples tells the whole story of the Bible. Work on this as a homegroup. Tell the story to one another.



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How does this story address those who are suffering during this season of Advent? How does the reality of God's presence in your life bring hope?

At the center of the temple theme in the Bible stands Jesus Christ. How is Jesus the fulfillment of the garden of Eden, the tabernacle and Solomon's temple?

The era of the first three temples ended in disappointment because of the people's sin and disobedience. What assurance can we have that the temple of Jesus' body will never disappoint us?

Sermon Notes

The End and the Beginning

If you had the time and inclination to read the entire Bible in a single sitting, and if your memory was pretty good, you might notice how similar the end is to the beginning.

At the end of the whole story we read,

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, the 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. Revelation 21:1-3 (emphasis added)

Do you remember the beginning of the story told in Genesis 1-3? The first book of the Bible begins with God creating the earth, designing it as a place where he can dwell.



The Temple-Garden of Eden

Commentators on Genesis 1-2 point out that the garden of Eden is more than a beautiful place. The garden is presented as a dwelling place for God on earth. Gordon Wenham observes,

The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him.¹

What happens that compels God to force Adam and Eve to leave the garden of Eden? Read Genesis 3:22-24.

In what ways are we still reeling from the effects of Adam and Eve's decision in the garden?

The early chapters of Genesis are marked by hope even when everything looks hopeless. Adam and Eve have to leave the garden, but not before God himself makes a obscure promise to send a redeemer. When speaking to the serpent, the Lord says that there will come one *who shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel* (Genesis 3:15). This is the first promise in the Bible of a coming redeemer, as vague and cryptic as it may be. Nevertheless, Adam and Eve must leave the garden. In so doing, they will leave the presence of God, the place where God dwells. Their situation appears to be hopeless.

The Desert-Tabernacle of Sinai

Centuries after Adam and Eve leave the garden of Eden, God again makes a place where he himself will dwell with his people and from which he will bless the whole earth. As the Jewish people leave Egypt after a period of enslavement, they make their way to the land of promise, the land of Israel. Along the way they are given instructions to build a tabernacle, a portable tent consisting of several rooms, where God will dwell with and meet the people. We catch a glimpse of the importance of the tabernacle simply by noting the space the Bible gives to its construction. A full 13 chapters of the book of Exodus are devoted to the building plan for this portable sanctuary.

¹ Cited in T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, p. 21.



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The fellowship that was broken in Eden will now be restored. God will meet with his people in this tabernacle which will be placed at the geographical center of the people as they make their journey toward the promised land.

When the tabernacle was completed, we learn that God's glory filled this sanctuary to the extent that Moses was unable to enter (Exodus 40:34-35). This appearance of God's glory was not a one-time event.

Read Numbers 9:15-17, 22. How would this have given God's people hope?

In the end, because of the people's sin, the tabernacle proves to be disappointing. When the land is occupied by the Jews, the tabernacle is set up in Shiloh, the geographical center of Israel. Because of the corruption of the priesthood (1 Samuel 2:12-17), however, God leaves the tabernacle and his glory departs from the land now inhabited by his people. Again, as in Eden, the situation looks hopeless.

The Jerusalem-Temple of Solomon

Eventually the people build a permanent temple in Jerusalem under the leadership of King Solomon and the instruction of God himself. Again, this temple is understood as the dwelling place of God on earth. As the Psalmist puts it,

For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: "This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it." Psalm 132:13-14

Indeed, from Zion (Jerusalem) God will bless the whole earth. *His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth* (Psalm 48:2). The temple was built and the people have hope.

Again, because of the people's sin, this temple is destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24-25). The people of God are forced to leave God's land as they become exiles in Babylon. Indeed, the glory has departed and things appear hopeless.

The God-Man Temple of Jesus' Body

In John's Gospel we find Jesus purifying the temple in Jerusalem at the beginning of his ministry. Read the dialogue Jesus has with the Jews in the temple after he purges the commercialism from the outer courts. (John 2:13-22)



The New Testament writers tease out this truth of Jesus being the true temple of God. For example, Ezekiel looks forward to a future temple and casts his vision of that temple as a place where water will gush out from the center and flow down the mountains of Jerusalem. Jesus, in his ministry, claims to be the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 40-48). He is the living water (John 7:37-39). He offers the woman at the well water that will satisfy her eternally (John 4:14). Another example is found in Hebrews 8-10 where Jesus is pictured as the true high priest who goes into the heavenly tabernacle and offers the one and only sacrifice for sin that was effectual. He offers his own blood.

Can you think of other examples in the New Testament that show Jesus as the true temple?

The New Jerusalem Temple of God

We are going to spend a significant part of Week 4 of Advent looking at the New Jerusalem. For a preview, read Revelation 21:9–22:5. Notice especially 21:22! The New Jerusalem is, indeed, the hope of every believer! In the New Jerusalem we are promised *holiness, wholeness, and love in the presence of God*.¹ This is cause for great hope as we celebrate Advent.

¹ Alexander T. Desmond, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, p. 187.



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Week 2

Peace: A Tale of Four Trees



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

As a homegroup, reflect on the teaching from last Sunday. Consider the sermon notes beginning on page twelve to help you reflect on peace and Advent.

What main point did you receive from Sunday's teaching? What did you learn about God and his greatness from Sunday's teaching?

Explain how this *tale of four trees* tells the whole story of the Bible. Work on this as a homegroup. What does the *tale of four trees* have to do with peace? Tell the story to one another.

How does the first coming of Christ reverse the curse of Genesis 3 that brought enmity to our world?



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How does the peace that Christ will usher in at his Second Coming relate to the peace we long for now? What kind of healing does our world need of which the fourth tree is emblematic?

How does the peace God gives relate to our call to be *peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9)? What does it mean to be children of God in this respect?

Sermon Notes

If you have ever read through the New Testament, you will surely remember that almost every letter begins with a similar greeting, *Grace and peace to you...*¹ *Peace* (shalom) was a common greeting among the Jews. And grace –*charis*– is a meaningful alternative to the standard Greek term for greetings –*chairein*. The combination of these terms, though, is much more than just a standard greeting for Christians. It is a hallmark of what we understand the Christian life to be all about. It is shorthand for what the gospel brings (peace) and how it is received (grace). Our attempts at gaining peace without receiving it by grace have been, however, the root of all our problems. This is the narrative that runs through the whole of Scripture and can be seen through the story of four trees.

The Tree of Life in Eden

At the beginning of the biblical story, in Genesis 2 we read,

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:8-9

¹ Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thes 1:1; 2 Thes 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 1:3; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 Jn 1:3; Jude 1:2; Rev 1:4



The description of Eden that follows is meant to give a picture of a perfect environment in which humanity will thrive. There is plenty of food and water (trees and rivers); there are valuable and beautiful things to enjoy (gold and other precious stones); and there is meaningful work to be done. In other words, it is a picture of *shalom*.

Cornelius Plantinga, in his book *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, describes the concept of *shalom* found in the Old Testament,

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. We call it *peace* but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things ought to be.¹

Shalom comes from the Hebrew root meaning *wholeness* or *perfection*. In the midst of this type of environment, God puts the tree of life. It is a sign of his grace – continued ability to enjoy all his good gifts. We probably shouldn't think of the fruit of the tree of life as granting instant immortality. Rather, it is like the fountain of youth. Continued access to this tree's fruit gives constant life and vitality. Adam and Eve are free to eat of this tree so long as they do not eat from the other...

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17)

Immediately questions come to mind... Why is it forbidden to eat of this tree? Isn't it a good thing to know about good and evil? Do we not want our children to know about good and evil so they can make wise decisions? Such questions, though, miss the mark in understanding how the Hebrew people would have understood the name of this tree.

Interpretations of what this tree signifies are many, but Hamilton is surely on target when he writes,

What is forbidden to man is the power to decide for himself what is in his best interests and what is not. This is a decision God has not delegated to the earthling. This interpretation also has the benefit of according well with 3:22, "the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil."²

1 Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, p. 10.

2 Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, 1, p. 166.



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The very presence of the tree of knowledge signifies God's choice to make trusting Him a fundamental issue of human existence. Adam and Eve's decision to eat of this tree was basically a rejection of God's authority and an unwillingness to trust in his goodness.

The Cross of Christ

The tragic consequences of their decision to eat of the second tree came swiftly – shame and a loss of *child-like* innocence. In their folly, they attempted to fix the problem themselves. *Rather than driving them back to God, their guilt leads them into a self-atoning, self-protecting procedure: they must cover themselves.*¹

Their situation is worse than they realize, though, for God responds in judgment. In Genesis 3:14-19, God addresses the rebels and speaks of the consequences of their sin which includes:

- Enmity between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring
- Tension between men and women
- Frustration and difficulty in work

In other words, God's peace was abdicated and his abundant blessing was replaced by a curse. Advent reminds us of how the curse was reversed. God came.

Read Philippians 2:5-11. As you read, notice the contrasts with the story of what transpired in the garden of Eden:

Adam and Eve	Jesus
Man wanted to become like God	God willing to become like man.
Child-like innocence abandoned	Humbled himself; born in the likeness of men
Disobedient	Obedient to the point of death
Humiliated	Exalted

¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, 1, p. 191.



In his Incarnation, the Son of God becomes a human baby, laying aside every right and privilege and demonstrating his willingness to live in complete dependence on God. In his death, Jesus completes what was begun at the manger as he humbly submits to the Father's will, thereby securing for us once and for all what was lost at the Fall – peace.

Notice how the New Testament links this third tree to the restoration of peace with God and one another for those who trust in Christ:

Romans 5:1-2

Ephesians 2:13-18

Colossians 1:19-20

The Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem

Advent is not only a time of looking back and remembering the first coming of Christ as a child, but also a time when we look ahead in anticipation to the Second Coming of Christ in glory. The last two chapters of the Bible form a wonderful bookend to the first few chapters of the Bible in Genesis. They give us a beautiful picture of Paradise restored.

In John 10:10, we find Jesus words, *I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly (ESV) / to the full (NIV)*. This idea of full, abundant life gets to the meaning of shalom (peace). The tree of life in Revelation 22:2 is a sign that Jesus' purpose in coming will finally be achieved.

The tree is said to bear fruit each month. Such a tree that yields a year-round harvest symbolizes the abundance and complete absence of want in the New Jerusalem. Not only that but *the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*. We should not infer from this that there will be continued need for healing, but rather that all enmity between people will have found its remedy.

This vision of future peace is given to the church in the present age. And the season of Advent is for us who live in between the comings of Christ to consider the nature of the kingdom of God. So then, the *tale of the four trees* is not like a bed-time story that we might read and then say, *Oh how nice!* On the contrary, this story ought to lead us to ponder how we fit into the narrative.

How are we tempted to act like Adam and Eve, claiming our own authority over our lives while spurning God's?



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How do we experience the peace of God that Christ's death has effected?

How does the assurance of shalom in the life to come free us to give ourselves to the work of God in the here and now?

How do we, as God's children, become like our Father in peace-making?

Reflect on the following verses as you ponder this question and your relationships.

Matthew 5:9

Romans 14:19

2 Corinthians 13:11

James 3:16-18





Week 3

Joy: A Tale of Three Persons



In his first letter to his young friend Timothy, the Apostle Paul bursts out into praise when thinking about the gospel. He speaks of *the gospel of the glory of the blessed God*. It would not be an overreach to translate this phrase, *the good news of the glory of the happy God*.

If we know anything about the God of the Bible, we know that he is gloriously happy in all that he is and all that he does.

Who, though, is this happy God? The God of the Bible is one God who exists in three persons, Father—Son—Holy Spirit. Each person of the triune God is fully God, yet each has a function distinct from the other two persons.

Christmas joy, the third week of Advent, celebrates the coming of the Christ child to Bethlehem. We must be careful as we celebrate Advent to understand the fullness of the joy that is ours. It wasn't as if when Jesus was conceived in the Virgin Mary a new being came into existence. Far from it. As Fred Sanders writes,

When Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born in Bethlehem, he began his incarnate existence. He became fully and truly human, without ceasing to be fully and truly divine. But he, the person who became incarnate, had already existed before his human birth.¹

Jesus, in other words, *already was*. As John 1:1 puts it in the opening of his Gospel, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God!*

Jesus is the eternal second person of the Trinity. Sanders says,

Jesus Christ, then, is eternally the Son of God; or, he is the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity... He is called Son because he is the Son of the Father from all eternity. When he becomes incarnate, he becomes the son of Mary, the promised son of David, the Messiah. But there was

¹ Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, p. 84.



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never a time when he became the Son of God; that is who he eternally and essentially is. For us and our salvation, the eternal Son became the incarnate Son.¹

Questions for Personal Reflection

Why was it said that the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity was a consequence of the joy of the Father? How should this inform your *Christmas joy*?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation of Jesus? In your own experience of *Christmas joy*?

What main point did you receive from Sunday's teaching? What did you learn about God and his greatness from Sunday's teaching?

How does the Father's pleasure in his Son address those who are suffering during this season of Advent?

Write a sentence or two of why what happened in Bethlehem can, and should be, the joy of your life.

¹ Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, p. 86.





Week 4

Love: A Tale of Two Women & Two Cities



Christmas and the Advent season are filled with meaningful symbolism. In Advent, the *coming* or *arrival* of the Christ child, we find the biblical themes of hope, peace, joy, and love coming into sharper focus.

One of the ways the love of Christ is expressed in the Bible is as a story, full of metaphorical language and rich images. The Scriptures, and in particular the last book in our New Testament, Revelation, tell a tale of two women, the *Bride of Christ* and the *Great Prostitute*, and two cities, the *New Jerusalem* and *Babylon the Great*. The language used to describe these two women and the two cities is meant to shock us into a deeper awareness of God's love for his people.

In Revelation 17-21, these graphic images and the metaphorical language come at the reader quickly and with unmistakable intent. The incompatibility of the *Bride of Christ* with the *mother of prostitutes* parallel two antithetical cities, the *New Jerusalem* and *Babylon*.

Think through some of the passages below. How is the *New Jerusalem* described? What happens in the *New Jerusalem*?

Revelation 3:12

Revelation 21:1-4

Hebrews 12:22-24



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The picture of the *Bride of Christ* is a picture of God's love relationship with his people. The image is intended to show how close and intimate is God's love for the church. Again, ponder the passages which follow. How is this bride described?

Revelation 19:7

Revelation 21:2, 9

In Ephesians 5:22-33, the Apostle Paul gives practical instructions to husbands and wives on how to love each other. The illustration he uses to explain this love relationship is the love Christ has for his bride, the church. How do these pictures in Revelation and Ephesians confirm and enhance the Christmas theme of God's love in sending Christ?

In the Old Testament, Israel is sometimes referred to as the wife of Yahweh or, the Lord (Isaiah 54:6, Ezekiel 16:8, Hosea 2:19-20).

While the *New Jerusalem* and the *Bride of Christ* point to God's intense love, *Babylon* and the *Great Prostitute* remind us of everything that stands in opposition to this love relationship.

Babylon was a real historical city that had immense power. Eventually, Babylon became a symbol of everything that stood against God. Read Revelation 17:1-6 and all of Revelation 18. Notice how *Babylon*, the anti-God city, is a place where adultery and prostitution takes place. How else are *Babylon* and the *Great Prostitute* described? What are these images meant to convey?

Disloyalty to God is pictured as adultery or prostitution in these passages. How does this startling illustration heighten your awareness of, and appreciation for, the love of Christ for his bride, the church?



At certain points in the biblical drama, God's love comes into sharper focus. Advent and Christmas is one of those times. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son . . .* (John 3:16). How does Christmas and the sending of God's son Jesus, make you freshly aware of God's love for you?

Thanks be to God for his love which found fulfillment in Christ! Write a few sentences of gratitude that, because of love, we are his *bride* and will eventually live in the *New Jerusalem*.



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