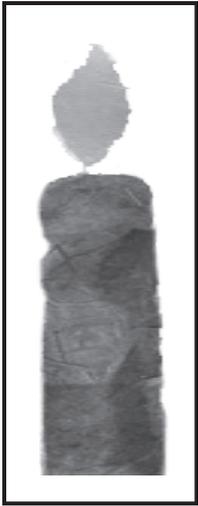




ADVENT | prepare

Christ

santa barbara community church | 2018



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.

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! 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. 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!*

A Note About This Advent Study

What follows are four studies intended for homegroup discussion or for personal reflection depending on how each homegroup will use them. These studies have been developed from notes provided by *The Bible Project*, a great resource that can be accessed online at www.thebibleproject.com.

As Advent is a time of looking back and looking forward, we will do this in a few different ways. Each study begins with a looking at some Old Testament uses of each word from that week's Advent theme, in order to begin to form our understanding of what the people of God were waiting for in the Messiah. We will then examine how Jesus fulfills those expectations through his incarnation. This looking back will then cause us to look forward and consider how we wait for the consummation of all these things at Christ's second coming.

The hope is that together, as a church community, we will *Come to Bethlehem and see, Christ the Lord, the newborn king*, and, in turn, look forward to when he will *Come [again] to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found!*



Hope

In the Old Testament, there are two main Hebrew words translated as *hope*. The first is *yakhal*, which means simply *to wait for*. As in the story of Noah and the ark, while the flood waters receded, Noah had to *yakhal* for weeks.

READ – Genesis 8:6-12

The word *wait* in this passage is elsewhere translated *hope*. Put yourself in this story; how would you describe Noah's waiting/hoping? Try to define the nature of this hope.

The other Hebrew word is *qavah*, which also means *to wait*. It's related to the Hebrew word *qav*, which means *cord*. When you pull a *qav* tight, you produce a state of tension until there's release. That's *qavah*: the feeling of tension and expectation while you wait for something to happen.

READ – Psalm 130

In this psalm in the ESV, *yakhal* is translated hope and *qavah* is translated wait. Describe the emotional state of the person writing this psalm.

In what or in whom are they hoping? What is the basis for their hope (vv 7-8)?

Have you ever had a time in your life when this Psalm would have described the state of your heart? In what or in whom did you place your hope at that time? Why?

In the book of Hosea, the prophet condemns Israel for their idolatry and, after detailing the judgment they will receive, he speaks of their restoration.

READ – Hosea 2:14-15

What is the basis for Israel's hope here?

God could turn this *valley of trouble into a door of hope*, like the day when Israel came up from the land of Egypt. God had surprised his people with redemption back in the days of the Exodus, and he could do so again.

As you think about your own life, how does looking back to what God has done in the past give you hope for your future?

The New Testament writers also point to God's actions in the past as grounds for our hope in the future. Look up the following passages and for each one, try to outline the following:

How is the present situation described?

What are we hoping for?

What is the basis of our hope?

1 Peter 1:3-7

1.

2.

3.

Colossians 1:21-27

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Romans 5:1-11

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Romans 8:18-25

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Think again about your own current circumstances. How would you answer the three questions above? Try to be specific and honest.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

1 Peter 3:15 says we need to be prepared to give an explanation of our hope to those who do not believe. Having done this study, how would you explain your Christian hope in the midst of your current circumstances?



Peace

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. The most basic meaning of *shalom* is *complete* or *whole*. The word can refer to a stone that has a perfect whole shape with no cracks. It can also refer to a completed stone wall that has no gaps and no missing bricks. *Shalom* refers to something that's complex with lots of pieces that's in a state of completeness or wholeness.

So Job says his tents are in a state of *shalom* because he has counted his flock and no animals are missing (Job 5:24). And when David visits his brothers on the battlefield, he is told to inquire about their *shalom* (1 Samuel 17:18). The core idea is that life is complex, full of moving parts and relationships and situations, and when any of these is out of alignment or missing, your *shalom* breaks down. Life is no longer whole; it needs to be restored. The basic meaning of *shalom*, when used as a verb, is *to make complete* or *to restore*.

Look up the following verses and describe how *shalom* is being used in each context.

1 Kings 9:25 (*shalom* is translated *finished*)

Exodus 22:1-9 (*shalom* is translated *pay*, *repay* and *restitution*)

Proverbs 16:7 (*shalom* is translated *peace*)

With all this in mind, we can turn to the well-known passage in Isaiah that looks forward to the Messiah's coming.

READ – Isaiah 9:2-9

How does Isaiah describe the peace that this royal son would bring?

It is this rich context, and the longing of all creation for *shalom*, that provides the background for the coming of Jesus. The New Testament picks up these themes but uses the Greek word *eirene*, which is translated *peace* in our English Bibles.

READ – Luke 2:1-14

What is the announcement that accompanies Christ's birth?

Read the following passages. How does Jesus fulfill the Old Testament longing for *shalom*? How do the New Testament authors describe the peace Jesus accomplished?

Romans 5:1, 6-11

Ephesians 2:11-22

Colossians 1:19-22

During the season of Advent we look back to Christ's first coming to give us confidence and hope as we await his second coming. When Jesus came, his life, death and resurrection accomplished peace for us now. In the Gospel of John, *peace* was his favorite greeting after the resurrection (see John 20:19, 21 and 26).

As we look for his second coming, what kind of *peace* are we still waiting for?

And as we wait, how might we experience his peace? (See John 14:27 and 16:33).

The world around us longs for peace. How does your reflection on Christ's first and second coming help you talk about the peace we can experience and for which we hope? How can the advent of Christ offer good news to your neighbors who long for peace?



Joy

Most languages have lots of words to describe the experience of being in a good mood: words like happy, cheerful, joyful, and so on. The same goes for the languages of the Bible. In ancient biblical Hebrew, a variety of words describe gladness or joy, such as *simchah*, *sason*, and *gijl*. In the Greek New Testament there are *chara*, *euphrosune*, or *agalliasis*. Each word has its own unique nuance, but they all basically refer to the feeling of joy and happiness.

Now what makes these biblical *joy* words interesting is noticing the kinds of things that bring happiness and also seeing how *joy* is a key theme that runs through the whole story of the Bible.

Where are some places we might find joy, according to these verses?

Psalm 65:11-12

Psalm 104:14-15

Proverbs 23:24-25

Proverbs 27:9

However, human history isn't just a joy-fest. The biblical story– and our own story– reminds us that we live in a world that's been corrupted by human selfishness as well as by death and loss. This is where biblical faith offers a unique perspective on joy. It is an attitude God's people adopt, not because of happy circumstances, but because of our experience of God's presence and expectation of his promises being fulfilled.

Psalm 105 recounts Israel's history from Abraham through the Exodus. At the end of the Psalm, the psalmist tells of Moses bringing the people out of Egypt– and they rejoice with singing.

READ – Psalm 105:39-43

Where are the people when they sing? What are their circumstances?

This *joy in the wilderness* was a defining moment. It was a way of saying that the joy of God's people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny. This theme reappears later in Israel's story during the exile.

READ – Isaiah 51:10-11

How does the prophet connect the Exodus to the people's return from Exile?

As we get to the New Testament, notice how the birth of Christ is announced by an angel:

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.

At his first coming, Christ's life, death and resurrection gave us great reason to rejoice and be glad. As we await his second coming, we can wait with joy.

Read the following passages, and take note of the theme of *joy in the wilderness*. What do these verses say about the joy we can have in this time between Christ's first and second coming?

Matthew 5:11-12

Acts 5:40-42

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 15:1-11

In the end, Jesus will come again to judge and finally put things aright. When that happens there will be tremendous joy:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come!"

As we have seen, the joy of God's people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny. This is very different from the trite advice to *turn that frown upside down!* Christian joy is a profound experience that springs from the reality of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and imminent return.

What about you? How does Christ's first coming bring you joy? How could a renewed hope in his second coming bring you joy?

In a culture obsessed with finding personal happiness, and in a season when we are surrounded with efforts to generate warm feelings, how is Christian joy different? How might you explain the difference to a neighbor or friend?



Love

If there is one word that Christians know can be found in the Bible, it's the word *love*. God is love. We are to love God and love our neighbor. Love is patient. Love is kind. There is a whole book in the Old Testament dedicated to love (Song of Solomon). We know love, right? Or do we?

All of this is beautiful language, but what exactly do we mean by the word *love*? It's an unclear word in English because you can love your mom, and you can love pizza. And if the word *love* means the same thing in both of those cases, your mom's going to feel really bad.

In both Hebrew and Greek, there are many words for love, each with different shades of meaning. But the most important uses of *love* are demonstrated through action. Love is not primarily a feeling that happens to you, like our phrase *I fell in love*. In the Bible, love is action. It's a choice that you make to seek the well-being of people other than yourself.

READ – Deuteronomy 7:6-9

There are actually three different Hebrew words used in these few verses for love. What does *love* mean according to these verses? How specifically is it shown?

The Old Testament prophets often reflect on the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of Israel using the metaphors of marital love and infidelity.

READ – Isaiah 63:7-9

After recounting God's judgment on Israel for their infidelity, how does the prophet say God's love was demonstrated in the past?

The season of Advent is actually the perfect time to consider what God means by the word *love*, because according to the Bible it is in Christ's coming that we get the clearest picture of what love is. How do the following passages define love according to Christ's first coming?

John 3:16

Romans 5:6-8

1 John 4:9

So far we have focused on God's love for his people. But as we know, God commands that we love in return. In fact, when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he said all of the writings of the Law and the Prophets are about loving God and loving your neighbor.

In **1 John 4:7-21**, John circles around all of these issues of God's love for us, our love for him and for neighbor, and Christ's first and second coming. The passage is nonlinear in its arrangement, but is a beautiful rumination on all of these topics.

READ – 1 John 4:7-21

Try to rearrange John's argument in a way that makes sense to you. How do you put together God's love, our responses of love, and the first and second comings of Christ?

How is what we find in these verses a different picture of love than what we might find in the world? How could this be good news to a world that thinks it understands *love*?

Finally, God's love not only preserves us from judgment at the second coming, but will also remake us.

READ – 1 John 3:1-2

How do these verses create a longing for the second coming in you? What is your response to this hope?

This Advent season we've looked at the four interrelated topics of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Suppose a non-Christian friend asked you about a bumper sticker they saw: *Jesus is the Reason for the Season*. Having done these studies, how might you use the Advent themes to share the good news of Christ? (They might be a skeptic, they might be antagonistic, they might be genuinely curious –you decide– how would you respond?)

