



### Introduction to Advent

The Christmas season is a time of expectation, waiting, and longing. We remember all our past Christmas experiences and yet we look forward with longing to Christmas 2019. Right now preparations are being made in your households for gifts, food, activities, and gatherings with family and friends. This excitement is all mixed in with disappointments, conflicts, and wondering how it will all turn out. This is a great picture of the present time in God's redemptive history. We call this season Advent. It is the time between God's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and when Jesus will return. His coming is imminent. Right now, Jesus is preparing a magnificent feast to celebrate and culminate God's redemptive work in human history. This feast we are told is like a wedding banquet with gifts, food, dancing, and gathering with all those we love to be with (Matthew 22:1-14). While He is preparing this party of all parties, invitations are being sent out, and we are waiting for the full number of those who will respond to the invitation to the wedding feast. While we wait, God has a purpose and plan for our lives. In fact, God is including us in the invitation and preparation for the feast!

As every child knows, the in-between time is the hardest time. The in-between time is filled with anticipation but also with disappointment and difficulty. The darkness we currently live in seems overwhelming yet we are told a light has come that will overcome the darkness (John 1). God has not abandoned us in this in-between time. In fact, just the opposite. He is with us in the Person of the Holy Spirit and has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Advent is the anticipation of His coming and the reminder of what God has given us to accomplish our purpose in our lifetime in order to share in the glory to come.



### **Fully present with the Holy Spirit**

*The angel answered Mary. "The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So that the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35*

*"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting" Acts 2:1*

After spending three amazing years with Jesus, it is hard for us to grasp just how shocking the death of Jesus was for the disciples. It is also hard to grasp how stunning it was for them to touch him, be with him, and eat with him again after watching his brutal death! After the resurrection, Jesus promised that even though he needed to go back to His Father in heaven he was going to give them an indescribable gift until he returned again. He said to wait and watch for this gift in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). This gift was the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Paul says when we place faith in Jesus we are, "marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession..." (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Jesus promised that God would be with His people until His return. The presence of God with us is found in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, Peter quotes the prophet Joel who foresaw this treasured gift. He prophesied that the gift of the Spirit was no longer for the select few like the virgin Mary. Rather the Spirit is available to all people. In this way the gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift of grace, poured out by God. An undeserved offer of God's indwelling presence in your life. His power is available for every person who has placed faith in Jesus. His work is to bring comfort, conviction, council, wisdom, power, transformation, growth, change, gifts, and fruit in our lives. The evidence of His presence in our lives is unmistakable, it is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control".

### **Discussion questions:**

1. The Holy Spirit is fully God as the 3rd Person of the Trinity. How have you understood and experienced the Holy Spirit in your life?
2. What is the significance of the Holy Spirit as a gift that Jesus left us until His return (John 14)?
3. How does the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God in us change the way we live in this present time?

*Peace*



### **Fully Present with Peace**

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” Luke 2:14*

In a world of conflict, God brings peace. The announcement of Jesus’ incarnation was heralded by the angel of the Lord with God’s glorious brilliance, overwhelming a group of poor ostracized shepherds. In their terror they tried to hide. But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid. I bring good news that will cause great joy for all the people (Luke 2:10).”

When we look at the life of Jesus, we don’t see the absence of conflict. In fact, Jesus’ life was marked by conflict. From Herod’s early attempt to kill him, the constant battle with the religious leaders, and Jesus’ own brutal torture and death on the cross, we see the constant presence of struggle and pain in Jesus’ life. Jesus told his disciples that they should not expect anything different. The call to follow Him would mean trouble and conflict. So, what do the angels mean by saying God would “bring peace on whom his favor rests”? The idea of Shalom (peace) in the Bible is not comfort, or necessarily that everything goes the way we want. It carries the idea of wholeness, satisfaction, fulfillment, and completeness. This peace from God changes how we go through conflict and trouble in our lives. Even though Jesus’ life was marked by conflict and struggle, people were drawn to Jesus because he revealed peace in the midst of the storm. His life was joy and contentment. His unselfish approach to others allowed him to not be caught up in the conflict but rather radiate goodness and love towards others. This is why He is called the Prince of Peace. Likewise, in our lives, we have the Holy Spirit who provides for us the, “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, that will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Imagine a world where this kind of peace was produced in every human heart!

#### **Discussion questions:**

1. How would you define peace? How would you describe the difference between the Holy Spirit peace and simply the absence of conflict?
2. How have you experienced this Holy Spirit’s peace in your life? How does this change your life and those around you?

Joy



### Fully Present with Joy

*"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Luke 1:45*

The Christmas carol "Joy to the World" points to the message of joy that Jesus brings to the world. The reality is that many people do not experience or represent this joy to the world. The misery many people feel and experience in their lives, they readily share with others. How can we as followers of Jesus experience and represent the joy of God in our lives and with others?

First, we cannot give what we do not have. The first step is always to receive. Receiving is probably the most difficult part of the Christian life. In receiving we have to admit that we do not have what it takes on our own. We must humbly approach God to ask for what only He can give. The song says, "Let earth receive her King and let every heart prepare Him room". This is an invitation to joy that Mary the mother of Jesus received when God presented to her the opportunity to receive the inception of the Savior in her body. Her response was one of humility and she received what only God could give her.

Second, we live in this in-between time with our faith in God. Mary sang a song of joy to God in the middle of the trial of an unplanned pregnancy. She said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." She did not focus on her circumstances, but rather fully trusted God's plan. She experienced and represented joy in its fullest. May we, like Mary, receive what only God can give and place our faith in him. He is faithful to give us joy!

### Discussion questions

1. How would you define joy? How is Holy Spirit joy different than the fleeting happiness of the world around us?
2. How have you witnessed this Holy Spirit joy in the lives of others and within you? How does this joy change you and those around you?

## Love



### Fully Present with Love

*“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Matthew 1:24-25*

Love is a difficult concept to nail down with a complete definition. In part, because love is more than an intellectual concept, it is an experience that every person understands.

People know when they have been loved or unloved. Ultimately love is understood through actions that go above and beyond the norm for the good of another person. There is an element of self-sacrifice and cost to the person who loves. Words must be backed up by actions for real love to be experienced. Jesus defined love, as “laying down one’s life for another” (John 15:13). We live in a world that defines and understands love from a selfish standpoint, but God reveals a love that is unconditionally based on His character and nature. As Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit fully love, glorify, and sacrifice for the good of the other. This communion of divine love opens the door for us to experience love as well. “For God so loved the World that he gave his one and only son...”. God gave sacrificially and unconditionally so that we too might be called children of God’s (Romans 8).

In the Christmas story, Joseph models this fully present love for us in the advent time. In the emotional and confusing circumstances of his fiancé getting pregnant, he receives a message of love from God that enables him to commit and take care of Mary while his own needs and desires are put on hold as he took part in God’s story of salvation to the world. May we, like Joseph, receive and learn the kind of love that can only come from God!

### Discussion questions:

1. How would you define love? How is Holy Spirit love different from the way the world understands and experiences love?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Have you observed or experienced unconditional love in others like Joseph shows Mary? If so, what did it look like?

# Hope



## Fully Present with Hope

*“They went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed” Matthew 2:9-10*

Martin Luther is reported to have said, “Everything that happens in the world is done by hope”. Hope creates life and movement in our lives. The opposite of hope is despair and death. Satan would like nothing more than to tempt us and lead us into hopelessness. Jesus, on the other hand, is the giver of hope. In this in between time in God’s story of redemption, we are left with 3 gifts for our present lives from God’s Spirit, faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). These three are the marks of the advent life in the waiting for His coming redemption of all things. Hope anchors our faith and releases us to love.

The wise men who traveled from Babylon to Bethlehem were moved by hope. They had faith that the Scriptures they read and the stars they studied would point them to the Savior of the World. They believed the Creator of the stars would lead them to the King. The journey was long, and arduous, and costly. Despite the hardship, their faith and love for the promised King set them out on the long road with gifts. Yet it was hope that anchored them to the fulfillment of the promise. Hope moved them in following the star which led them to the child King who they worshiped.

Hope in Jesus did not disappoint them and neither will our living hope in Jesus disappoint us as we place our faith and love in Him.

### Discussion questions:

1. How would you define hope? What is the difference between a desired wish or outcome and a hope anchored in a trustworthy promise?
2. How have you seen the power of hope in God create movement and life in others and in yourself? How have you seen faith, hope, and love work together in your life?