

2019 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE

BEHOLD THE KINGDOM



CAPITAL
PRESBYTERIAN
FAIRFAX



MCLEAN
PRESBYTERIAN

A NOTE FROM OUR SENIOR PASTOR

The purpose of this guide is to give our Capital Pres Family a supplemental resource for midweek worship. Within these pages, you'll consider the kingdom that Jesus announced, examine the joy, peace, and power that Christ brings to all who live for him, and look ahead to the day when his kingdom will be complete.

Each devotional connects to our Advent sermon series, Behold the Kingdom. As we move through these weeks together, I pray these materials will be helpful in your personal devotions, family worship, Community Group, or other gatherings.

Nothing in the world is better than walking with Jesus. May we all experience the power of his presence this Advent.

Merry Christmas,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Forsyth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Forsyth
Senior Pastor

USING THIS DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE

If you are still exploring faith or recently started following Jesus, here are some helpful pointers to help you get the most out of this devotional:

1. ***Don't feel intimidated!*** This resource is meant to help you, not confuse you. If time is an issue, break up each devotional into smaller parts to complete it throughout the week. The goal is meeting with God, not checking boxes.
2. ***Allow the Bible to speak for itself.*** Read the passages multiple times. Look them up in the Bible and read them in their wider context.
3. ***Use this resource in community.*** Ask a friend or another Christian you know to walk through this devotional with you.
4. ***Pray that God would become more real to you.*** God listens to our prayers, and this is one he is delighted to answer!

THE MEANING & PURPOSE OF THE ADVENT SEASON

The great proclamation “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14) assures us that God has entered into human history through the incarnation of the Son. The season of Advent, a season of waiting, is designed to cultivate our awareness of God’s actions – past, present, and future. In Advent we hear the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming as addressed to us – people who wait for the second coming. In Advent we heighten our anticipation for the ultimate fulfillment of all Old Testament promises, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, death will be swallowed up, and every tear will be wiped away. In this way Advent highlights for us the larger story of God’s redemptive plan.

A deliberate tension is built into our practice of the Advent season. Christ has come, and yet not all things have reached completion. While we remember Israel’s waiting and hoping and we give thanks for Christ’s birth, we also anticipate his second coming at the end of time. For this reason, Advent began as a penitential season, a time for discipline and intentional repentance in the confident expectation and hope of Christ’s coming again.

The Advent season includes the four Sundays preceding Christmas. Worship on these Sundays is designed to help people see the tension between celebrating and hoping.¹

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

The lighting of Advent candles dramatically depicts the growing expectation we have for the coming of Christ, the light of the world.

The traditional Advent wreath has four purple candles (lit on the four Sundays of Advent) grouped around a white Christ candle (lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day).² The main symbolism portrayed by the wreath is the growing intensity of light as we light an additional candle each week, building anticipation for the celebration of Christ’s coming.

Some congregations attribute particular meaning to individual candles, associating them with hope, peace, joy, and love. This is the pattern that we as the Capital Pres Family will follow this year.

As you use these materials for personal devotions, family worship, in your Community Group, or other gatherings, you may even want to use an Advent wreath and light your own candles throughout the season as you read through the devotional each week.

¹Reprinted by permission from *The Worship Sourcebook, Second Edition*, © 2013, Faith Alive Christian Resources.

²A tradition calling for the third candle to be pink is not especially important. It is based on a medieval tradition in which the second to last Sunday of Advent accented Christian joy in the middle of what was traditionally a penitential season.

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 1

LIGHTING THE HOPE CANDLE

Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It is the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulations, of scurrying and worrying. And hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion or fantasy to protect us from our boredom or our pain. It means a confident, alert expectation that God will do what he said he will do. It is imagination put in the harness of faith. It is a willingness to let God do it his way and in his time.³

CALL TO WORSHIP: PSALM 130:5-8

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

PRAYER

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, with fuller life, and light, and love, into this too dead, and dark, and cynical soul, that it may come with joyful willingness unto you. Amen.

Prayer by Richard Baxter

SONG: COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS - VERSE 1

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee:
Israel's Strength and Consolation, Hope of all the saints thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 6:10

MEDITATION: "WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?" BY MIKE QUINN, RULING ELDER

As a boy, I would spend the Advent season on our family farm in Franklin County, Virginia, just south of Roanoke. It still feels familiar — hayfields, mountains, streams; cold, crisp moonlit nights; frost glistening across the morning fields; the scent of pine and coal; anticipation of family coming, perhaps a deep snow; fresh ham, green beans, and apple pie. Each day before the arrival of Christmas, I would walk through the hardwoods, look for arrowheads in the fields, and stir up groundhogs and squirrels. I would spend hours exploring the 365 acres that belonged to the Quinn family. As far as my eyes could see, it was our property — paradise, my domain and kingdom, a place of beauty, adventure, and peace.

³Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 144.

Though the family farm is gone today, I still remember it well and think of it often. It truly was a kingdom, yet it's a place in the past to which I can never return — divided into parcels and sold. A fond memory I look back on with a sense of loss, knowing that it is just a memory.

As I look toward to this coming season of Advent, I still love those early memories and think often of this childhood kingdom. Yet as I've read the Scriptures and walked (often stumbled) with God for many years, I've come to develop a deep love for his kingdom — a place not just of healing and wholeness, but also of his presence with us. When Jesus was teaching his disciples how to pray, he mentions that kingdom and commands us to ask for it, saying, "Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done." He does this because he knows that his kingdom is the only one that can fulfill our deepest longings. He puts it this way in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." When Jesus speaks of "all these things," he's referring to our expressed physical, mental, and emotional needs — good food, a place to live, and yes, our feelings.

But isn't it interesting that Jesus is instructing his disciples to pray for something that is already taking place among them. The kingdom has come, and it's come in the unlikeliest of ways — in the arrival of Jesus. While the disciples did not fully understand what God's kingdom would be like, Jesus did. And because he fully understands, he instructs his followers to long for and pray for this kingdom to become more real in them and in the world.

Advent is a season of looking forward, but it is also a time to look backward and remember. One of the greatest calls for Christians is to remember God's goodness, his promises in his word, and his faithfulness towards his people and towards us. Remembering gives us great hope!

So as we enter into and participate in this season of Advent, let each of us remember. Whether it's a childhood memory of a family farm or the joy of being with loved ones, it is good to remember. But let us pray and look forward to the coming of his kingdom — a kingdom of beauty, adventure, and peace; a kingdom that will not be divided into parcels or sold off; a kingdom that was purchased at a great cost; a kingdom where the "dwelling place of God is with his people." May each of us be richly blessed by this reality and may the peace of Christ be alive in our hearts during this Advent season

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) What are some of your favorite Christmas memories? What makes them so precious?
- 2) Do you regularly feel a longing for God's kingdom? Why or why not? How can we grow this desire?
- 3) What can you do this week to remember God's goodness, promises, and faithfulness?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Praise God for happy and joyful memories that you have had of Christmas.
- 2) Repent for the ways you have lived for your own kingdom, and not God's.
- 3) Ask for a greater desire for his kingdom, and that it would come on earth as it is in heaven.
- 4) Yield to the direction of the Holy Spirit in your life, and obey his promptings.

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 8

LIGHTING THE PEACE CANDLE

Let us at this season approach him with awe and love, in whom resides all perfection, and from whom we are allowed to gain it. Let us come to the sanctifier to be sanctified. Let us come to him to learn our duty, and to receive grace to do it. At other seasons of the year we are reminded of watching, toiling, struggling, and suffering; but at this season we are reminded simply of God's gifts towards us sinners...Christ comes at other times with garments dyed in blood. But now he comes to us in all serenity and peace, and he bids us rejoice in him, and to love one another.⁴

CALL TO WORSHIP: ISAIAH 9:2, 6-7

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.

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 Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
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.

PRAYER

O God, our Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, we bless you and praise you and glorify you, that you have fulfilled your ancient promises: that he is come, the Seed of the woman, who has bruised the head of the serpent; that he is come, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed; that he is come whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Give us your joy this day; may we hold thankful conversation with each other, and eat our meat in gladness and singleness of heart. May we rejoice with our neighbors in your house, and send our praises up to your throne. Amen.

Prayer by Henry Alford

SONG: JOY TO THE WORLD - VERSE 1

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth receive her King,
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room, and heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n and heav'n and nature sing!

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 6:46-49

⁴John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), sermon VII.

MEDITATION: “JOYFUL OBEDIENCE” BY KRISTEN SEDA, BOARD OF WOMEN

As we light Advent candles, put up Christmas trees, and decorate the home — preparing for the celebration of Jesus’ birth — I come across handmade ornaments lovingly crafted and painted. Each piece was made by my grandfather who I wish was here and I am suddenly caught by deep longing for him and for the future where I will see him again. Each piece is a small reminder of him: his love, his care, his creativity. A carpenter by training, he didn’t just make trinkets, but he built homes. The work of his hands became a testimony to what he believed and valued, and that shaped our family for generations to come. So, I don’t find it surprising that, when Jesus wants to emphasize the importance of his words, he uses the imagery of his trade, which resonates through the centuries — for who, in some way or another, hasn’t built a home?

This passage should stop us in our tracks. Stop calling Jesus Lord and not doing as he says. Stop nodding your heads and doing something different with your words and actions. Jesus says that’s as ridiculous and dangerous as building a house and not following sound advice and direction. Instead, following him means to dig deep, to set your house on a solid foundation, so that what you build will last. I can hear an echo of the carpenter’s saying, “measure twice, cut once.”

While these words of Jesus certainly carry a warning, we can find a great deal of wonder and joy in this imagery. The house a person builds reflects the master craftsman. Jesus has no interest in us simply calling him, “Lord,” but knowing nothing of who he is. He commands us earlier in this passage to love our enemies, to pray for those who abuse us, to give to everyone who begs from us. With each command we follow, is it not a declaration of our trust in Jesus? While we might not always know why, even when it’s hard, we trust the master carpenter of our lives. He has instructed us on how to build our lives for our protection, for our flourishing, and for God’s glory. As we reflect on the framework of our lives, we discover God’s mercy, his love for us, and his kindness. And when the storms of life come we can look at the “house” built around us, the foundation below our feet — and we don’t see wood, paint, and nails; we see Jesus.

In this season, as we dig deep into the truth of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, let us take time to read, to hear his voice, and to put into action his instructions for our lives. As we joyfully obey him, we know him more and long more fervently for the day we’ll see him face-to-face.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you have a favorite Christmas ornament? Why is it special to you?
- 2) Every person is building their life on some foundation. What were you building your life on before you came to Christ? In what ways are you currently tempted to live for something other than Jesus and his word?
- 3) How have you seen God sustain you in a period of difficulty? What did he teach you through it?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God’s Spirit spoken to you in today’s Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Praise God for his love, care, and creativity.
- 2) Repent of the ways you have trusted in yourself and not in Christ and his word.
- 3) Ask God to speak to you, to open your ears to hear, and to give you power to obey him joyfully.
- 4) Yield your heart to receive Christ’s mercy and grace.

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 15

LIGHTING THE JOY CANDLE

A sort of joy exists that knows nothing at all of the heart's pain, anguish, and dread; it does not last; it can only numb a person for the moment. The joy of God has gone through the poverty of the manger and the agony of the cross; that is why it is invincible, irrefutable. It does not deny the anguish, when it is there, but finds God in the midst of it, in fact precisely there; it does not deny grave sin but finds forgiveness precisely in this way; it looks death straight in the eye, but it finds life precisely within it...Only in such joy in Christ the Redeemer shall we be preserved from hardening ourselves where human suffering encounters us.⁵

CALL TO WORSHIP: 1 PETER 1:3-5, 8-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we praise and magnify you for voluntarily emptying yourself of your fullness, and for graciously taking upon yourself our weak and degraded nature, capable of suffering and of death, that you might fill us by emptying yourself, might save us by your sufferings, might raise us by your lowliness, might strengthen us by your weakness, and by your death might bring us to a glorious immortality. Amen.

Prayer by Thomas à Kempis

SONG: JOY TO THE WORLD - VERSE 2

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns; let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy!

SCRIPTURE READING: MARK 8:1-10

MEDITATION: "JOYFUL DEPENDENCE" BY JENNA PHILLIPS, STUDENT

God made us to be dependent on him and this dependence requires Jesus. He needed to come in order to redeem us and buy us back from the sin to which we were enslaved. God's incredible gift to us is forgiveness for our sins through Jesus. But he does something better than just rescue us and leave us to ourselves: God saves us from our sins in order that we can enjoy a relationship with him. He gives us more than salvation; he gives us himself! Through Jesus, he broke down the barrier that separated a perfect God from an imperfect people and made possible a relationship that thrives in our dependence on him.

⁵Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 377.

God creating us to depend on him is kind of a crazy truth, all things considered. Usually, we (me included!) don't really like to be dependent. Our reasons vary and they aren't always bad, but overall, we prize independence. The world that we live in reinforces independence and tells us that dependence is a sign of weakness and that we should be able to do it all ourselves. It is truly a relief that God doesn't work that way, because we just can't live a perfect life on our own. Even attempting to can feel crushing. Dependence is his gift to us, and he knows that a life in joyful dependence is best for us.

Dependence on God can take different forms. For example, in Mark 8:1-10, the large crowd following Jesus is hungry. Jesus is unwilling to send them away hungry, so he fulfills their needs by making a few pieces of bread and fish into enough food to feed thousands of people. The people were dependent on God for even the little things, and at the end of the passage, Mark reports that they were satisfied. In our daily lives, depending on God could be spending time in the Bible to learn more about him, deciding to trust him when he doesn't feel near, or asking him for strength to make it through the day. It could also look like going to God in tears, crying out that we have nothing left to give, and pleading with him to carry this burden with us. Those all feel like humbling or low places to be (trust me, I've been there), but when God answers by drawing us closer to him, the hard places hold so much fulfillment.

Joyful dependence and desiring more of God is the best life. We can't use dependence to get something better because there isn't anything better. When we're redeemed by Jesus, we are set free from the sin that weighs us down. Depending on God is one way we can be reminded of that freedom, which transforms us to lead a life full of joy and love. God comes near to us when we depend on him and he gives us more of himself, which is far better than anything else he could give us. Ask God to teach you how to depend on him and to give you more of himself. That's a prayer he wants to answer!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you find it difficult to depend on other people or to ask for help? Why or why not?
- 2) In what ways are you tempted to believe that you need to move beyond Jesus to something else for joy and fulfillment? How is Jesus himself ultimately better than any other source of happiness?
- 3) What does it look like to depend fully on Jesus today?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Praise God for his love, care, and provision, in great things and small.
- 2) Repent of the ways you have sought to be independent from God.
- 3) Ask God to teach you how to depend on him, and to give you more of himself.
- 4) Yield to God and let him provide for you today.

THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

WEEK OF DECEMBER 22

LIGHTING THE LOVE CANDLE

If you took the love of all the best mothers and fathers who ever lived (think about that for a moment) – all the goodness, kindness, patience, fidelity, wisdom, tenderness, strength and love – and united all those virtues in one person, that person would only be a faint shadow of the love and mercy in the heart of God for you and me.⁶

CALL TO WORSHIP: PSALM 18:1-3

I love you, O LORD, my strength.

The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.

PRAYER

O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God and heirs of eternal life, grant us, we ask you, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure: that when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom, where with you, O Father, and you, O Holy Ghost, he lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer

SONG: JOY TO THE WORLD - VERSE 3

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found!

SCRIPTURE READING: JOHN 21:15-19

MEDITATION: “KINGDOM POWER” BY DANIEL CHAPMAN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Peter and the disciples were waiting for the same kingdom we’ve been talking about throughout this Advent season. They watched as the man they followed and loved taught about the kingdom of God. Peter caught glimpses of it as Jesus fed thousands of people, healed his mother-in-law, and stilled a storm. Despite all that, Peter betrayed the kingdom by denying the king. And in this passage, he and the other disciples are still waiting. They were given their mission in John 20:21, but now they don’t seem to know where to begin.

This is how Jesus finds Peter and the other disciples in our passage. This is too often how Jesus finds all of us. We’ve seen his power, we know the truth of his kingdom, but we still fail and betray him, and like Peter returning to his fishing, we turn inward, back to the things that make us feel safe.

⁶ Brennan Manning, *The Furious Longing of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2000), 42.

Look how Jesus draws Peter aside, seeking him out. He isn't blind to what Peter's done — he asks three times whether Peter loves him and by the third time "Peter was grieved." Peter saw what Jesus was doing — each "Do you love me" called to mind Peter's three-fold insistence, "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:74). But Jesus' questions are not meant to shame or even condemn Peter.

Look at Jesus' question to Peter. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Every time that Peter responds, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you," he is rooted and grounded in the only one who can give him strength. Jesus seeks Peter out and points Peter to himself. Now imagine Jesus asking you the same question, for that is why Christ came — he came to seek us out, heal our betrayals, and reroot our misplaced love into him.

But Jesus does one more thing for Peter and for us. He starts with restoration, but then gives Peter a mission — "feed my sheep." This isn't the price of Peter's restoration; it's not a way for Peter to pay off his debt. Jesus is bringing Peter into the work of the kingdom — showing Christ's love to others so that they might know him. Peter is not disqualified from service in the kingdom, in fact Jesus' question is the only qualification to enter the kingdom. No matter how much it might grieve us to hear his question, if we answer yes, then we are his, and he has work for us.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) As we get closer to Christmas, do you find yourself getting more excited or ready to move on? Why do you think that is?
- 2) Jesus sought Peter out and then pointed Peter to himself. How have you seen Jesus call you out and point you back to himself?
- 3) Jesus restored Peter, then gave him a mission. And this pattern is true for us as well. What mission has Jesus given us? How might we go about accomplishing it this week?

PRAYER PROMPTS

How has God's Spirit spoken to you in today's Advent devotional? Respond to him now in prayer using these prompts.

- 1) Praise God for his power and his love and patience towards us.
- 2) Repent of the ways we have denied Christ by our words, thoughts, and actions.
- 3) Ask God to give opportunities to spread his kingdom through evangelism and mission.
- 4) Yield to the love of Christ — you are his!

2019 ADVENT SCHEDULE

DECEMBER 1

ADVENT COMMUNION

7pm in the McLean Sanctuary

DECEMBER 15

LIVE NATIVITY

8:30am on the McLean Lodge Lawn

CHRISTMAS CONCERT & RECEPTION

7pm in the McLean Sanctuary

DECEMBER 24

FAMILY CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

3pm & 4:30pm in the McLean Fellowship Hall

CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

6pm in McLean & Fairfax

8pm in McLean

**MCLEANPRES.ORG/CHRISTMAS
FAIRFAXPRES.ORG/CHRISTMAS**