



ADVENT | prepare  
*Christ*

santa barbara community church | 2016





# Advent

*The more I live in the grand opening of the Gospel of John, the grander it becomes! What an amazing text! If someone in my church were to interview me about the meaning of the Christmas season, I would ask to simply read this text... slowly. Simple enough vocabulary, relatively easy to comprehend words, stitched together to draw us... step-by-step... ever more deeply into ever more profound wonder! The text takes us into the heart of the story we have to tell the world. The text takes us into the heart of the story of how the world is being made new.*

So says Darrell Johnson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Vancouver, Canada.

The beginning of John's gospel, the prologue contained in 1:1-18, is indeed a great Advent passage in Scripture. It is true that when we think about Christmas and the Bible, we generally think about shepherds, wise men, the overly-booked inn in Bethlehem, and Mary sitting on a donkey. Perhaps we think of Mary and Joseph's flight to Egypt because of the evil King Herod. Or maybe we think of Simeon and Anna in the temple celebrating the fact that they see the Lord's anointed one. None of these, however, are found in John 1. Nevertheless, the Fourth Gospel takes us through Advent surely and steadily. The apostle wants us to see what we call *Christmas* from a broad and deep perspective not seen in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Advent. What does the word mean? Advent means *coming* or *arrival*. For two millennia the church has celebrated in various ways the advent of Jesus. Advent is an annual *looking back on*, and a *looking forward to*, the coming of the Messiah!

Accordingly, Advent is a time of celebration, of pondering, of anticipation. Advent is a time to celebrate the fruit of the work of Jesus; that is, a time to express our hope in him, our peace with God through him, our joy because of him, and the love we experience from him.

# Study Schedule

Sermon	Study	Topic	Schedule
11/27/16	1	Hope	Individual Study
12/4/16	2	Peace	Homegroups meet
12/11/16	3	Joy	Homegroups meet
12/18/16	4	Love	Individual study

This Advent Study has been created for both homegroup and individual use. Benji Bruneel wrote study 1, Steve Jolley study 2 and Reed Jolley wrote studies 3 and 4.



## **Week 1**

# *Hope*

## **John 1:1-5**

John's gospel begins not with the events of Christmas that took place in Bethlehem, but much further in the past. John's wide-angle viewpoint on the life of Jesus Christ compels him to take his readers back into deepest eternity in order to demonstrate God's heart for the redemption of the lost.

Read John 1:1-5. Take your time and read these verses in a variety of translations. As you read, you will notice that John uses two different metaphors to speak about Jesus: the Word and the light. Once you've digested these verses, make some notes on what John says in this short section about each of these metaphors.

Word

Light

If all you had in hand was John 1:1-5, what would you learn about the character and nature of Jesus?

John begins his gospel with the same words that begin the whole Bible: *In the beginning* (see Genesis 1:1). What do you think is his purpose in doing so?

What is so significant about Jesus' background that John would spend so much time on it at the outset of his gospel?

Respond personally to John 1:4. How has Jesus brought both life and light into your life?

John's purpose in writing his gospel is spelled out clearly in 20:30-31:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

How do the themes of 1:1-5 support the accomplishment of this goal?

During the first week of Advent, churches around the world consider the theme of hope. How does this brief passage encourage you to be hopeful?

Spend some time praying. Thank God for his eternal purposes in redemption– that your salvation was not an afterthought. Thank God for his creation– for its staggering beauty, stunning complexity, and for sustaining it all. Praise Jesus for being the eternally existing Creator and the one who brings light and life. Ask God to shine that light into areas you desire to remain hidden in darkness. Ask God to increasingly make you a person of hope.





## Week 2

# Peace

## John 1:1-18

*In him was life and life was the light of all men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:4-5*

The Advent season is a time of expectant waiting for the coming of Christ, the Son of God. In the prologue to John's gospel, the first 18 verses set the stage for the arrival of this savior who will bring the light of salvation to lost people living in darkness. In our first Advent study we pondered the eternal nature of Jesus and learned that Jesus existed long before Christmas. Jesus is the light of the world because he is, in fact, God.

In this study, we want to consider another astounding truth about Jesus. John writes, the *Word*, the light, the eternal Son of God, came into our world as a real human. Read John 1:1-18 several times. What do you learn about the humanity of Jesus Christ?

Verse 14 is one of the most staggering statements in the Bible. *And the Word became flesh...* Think about the implications of God coming to us as a human.

Commentator Bruce Milne makes the following observation.

The word *flesh* is a startling one (*sarx*). John deliberately bypasses ‘*man*’ or ‘*a body*’. “*Flesh*” stands for the whole person; it refers to human existence in its frailty and vulnerability. Jesus identified with us to that degree. He made our creaturely weakness his very own form of being.

How does this wonderful truth of God coming to us in *flesh* bring you peace and comfort?

How does the incarnation of Jesus make Christianity unique from all other world religions in the world?

John 1:1-18 makes the case that Jesus was both God, the eternal *Word* that created the world, and the *Word* that came to us in flesh as a real human being. Which truth about Jesus do you find more difficult to understand and believe? Why?

The Bible clearly teaches that God came to us as a human being in Christ. We should admit that this truth overwhelms the mind. C. S. Lewis rightly calls the incarnation *the Grand Miracle*. Certainly one appropriate response to this grand miracle is humility. How does the fact that Jesus took the initiative in coming to us in *flesh* cause you to respond in humility?

Verse 14 continues, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...* What is the difference between *visiting* and *dwelling*? What does the fact that Jesus *dwelt* among us tell you about the nature and mission of Jesus?

To be a human being is to know and experience weakness and suffering. No matter how wonderful our lives are, there is pain that accompanies living in this world. The Christmas story proclaims that Jesus dwelt with us in a broken world. He personally experienced pain, and ultimately, the supreme suffering of the cross. His suffering was part of his dwelling with us. What comfort do you find knowing that Jesus has firsthand knowledge of the types of frustrations, disappointments, loneliness and sorrows we experience?

Verse 18 unambiguously says that *No one has ever seen God*. Our passage, however, ends with the surprising words *he [Jesus] has made him[God] known*. What does the incarnate Jesus tell you about the character and nature of God?

Gather up your thoughts from this study. How does John 1:1-18 and the truths we have looked at affect your life practically? In other words, so what? What difference does all this make as you live the Christian life?



### Week 3

## Joy

### John 1:9-13

Read John 1:9-13 slowly several times, and perhaps from several translations.

These words are striking when we compare them to what we pondered during the first week of Advent. There, we saw the eternal biography of Jesus. He has always existed. He is the eternal second person of the Trinity! As one writer puts it,

- *Long before His baptism*
- *Long before His conception in the virgin's womb*
- *Long before David*
- *Long before Moses and the Exodus*
- *Long before Abraham*
- *Long before Noah*
- *Long before Adam and Eve*
- *Long before the mountains erupted in the seas*
- *Long before dinosaurs roamed the earth*
- *Long before any primordial ooze began to stir*
- *Long before any kind of Big Bang*

*Long before any of this, Jesus was.*

With this in mind, consider again John 1:9: *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world!*

What do you think John means when he says that Jesus gives light to *everyone*?

Notice that the Word, or Jesus, is said to be the *true* light. Here, from the beginning of John's gospel we see Jesus presented as the *truth*. Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus will claim to be *the truth* in addition to being the way and the life. When he stands before Pontius Pilate, the governor asks, *What is truth?* The reader knows, of course, that the truth is standing right before Pilate (John 18:38).

We live in a world where *truth* is up for grabs. For the most part, our society has given up on the notion of truth, replacing it with personal values. Truth is said to be relative. Some things are *true for you, but not for me*.

As one anonymous blogger put it,

*All objects, dreams ideas and "truths" are different for each person. I've put "truths" in quotes because as you'll see, "truth" is subjective! Essentially we all live in different worlds; we may have things in common with other people, but because of our background and our subjective interpretation of the world – our unique perspective – our world can be polar opposite from the person sitting next to us.*

These kinds of statements are not difficult to find in a culture that has lost its moorings. What does John 1:9 say to such an understanding of truth?

Why is the declaration that the Word is *the true light* a cause for joy in your life?

What would your life be like without *truth*?

Notice that the *true light* was coming into the *world*. John loves to use the word *world*. Of the 125 occurrences of this word in the New Testament, 78 are found in the writings of John, and the vast majority of those instances have negative connotations. Indeed, in John *the world* hates Jesus (7:7), but Jesus came into the *world* to rescue people from the darkness (12:46). *The world* will no longer see Jesus, but his disciples who are called out of *the world* will continue to see Jesus and therefore live (14:19).

Why is it good news that the light *was coming into the world*?

What is the world's response to the coming of the Light (v10)?

What is the response of Jesus' own people to his arrival (v12)?

How does the presence of Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, and in his Body, the church, continue to affect *the world*? What would the United States be like without the presence of God's church?

We can't gloss over the bitter irony of John 1:11. Jesus came to his own (or *his own home*), and his own people rejected him.

Consider the following by commentator William Barclay:

*Jesus came to a land which was peculiarly God's land, and to a people who were peculiarly God's people. He ought, therefore, to have been coming to a nation that would welcome Him with open arms; the doors should have been wide open for Him. But He was rejected. He was received with hate and not with adoration.*

Commentator Bruce Milne catches the sadness in this verse.

*There can be no more poignant expression of human folly and perversity than Israel's rejection of Christ (documented in the following chapters of John). In spite of all the centuries of waiting for their promised Messiah, when at last he appeared they not only dismissed his claim but instigated his destruction.*

This rejection, though, is not absolute. How do verses 12-13 describe God's entire plan of salvation? Verse 12 contains the first instance of *believing* in Jesus as the pathway to our salvation. Consider

John 3:16

John 6:29

John 7:38

John 11:26

John 14:1

When did you first come to *believe* in Jesus? How has this belief filled you with hope?

In 1719, Isaac Watts, one of the greatest hymn writers of all time, penned a hymn titled Joy to the World. Though it became known as such, it was not written as a Christmas hymn at all, but rather about the second coming of Jesus. Regardless, Watts' lyrics fit perfectly the joy we experience at Christmas time. Sing this together as a homegroup or on your own. Consider looking at Psalm 98, upon which Watts based his hymn. Spend time giving thanks for the joy you experience now in the Light of the world. Anticipate together the joy you will experience when Jesus comes again!

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come.  
Let earth receive her King  
Let every heart  
Prepare Him room  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and heaven and nature sing*

*Joy to the world, 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*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love;  
And wonders of His love;  
And wonders, wonders of His love.*

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come.  
Let earth receive her King  
Let every heart  
Prepare Him room  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and nature sing  
And heaven and heaven and nature sing!*



## Week 4

# Love

## John 1:14-18

Read John 1:14-18 slowly and several times from more than one translation. Read these verses again along with the rest of the prologue of John's gospel (1:1-18).

Ponder John 1:14. Doesn't this seem incongruous? Would you have expected John to emphasize beholding the glory of *the Word* who became flesh? Wouldn't you expect John to say, *The Word became flesh and, at last, humanity had a way to be saved?* Or perhaps, *The Word became flesh and, finally, Satan was crushed!* Or wouldn't you have expected John to say, *God became one of us, and sin was finally defeated?*

Instead, the emphasis at the end of this grand prologue to John's gospel speaks of the Word revealing the glory of God! What do you make of this?

John's vocabulary helps immensely. When we read *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*, the apostle is giving us a clue to his meaning. The word *dwelt* means, literally, *to pitch a tent*. The verse could be translated *tabernacled among us*, or, *tented among us*.

Do you remember Moses and the book of Exodus? Moses is wrestling with God, so to speak, concerning his calling by God to lead the people to the land of promise. Moses insists that

the presence of God goes with the people. In the midst of the conversation between Moses and YHWH, the God of Israel, Moses blurts out what he really wants. *Please, show me your glory!* (Exodus 33:18)

John is doing something intentionally. He is taking the reader back to the place where God's glory could be found: the tabernacle described in the book of Exodus, and later in the temple in Jerusalem. When each was dedicated, God's glory was so evident, so visible, and so powerful that no one could enter these places where God was (see Exodus 40:34-35, 1 Kings 8:10-11).

Now John says that the glory of God has come in a person. Real flesh and blood, a real person, and yet, the glory of God himself!

Read through this passage once again. What does the apostle John say about this glory who has become flesh? What has glory incarnate done?

Pastor Darrell Johnson's exultation in this verse deserves our attention.

*The flesh of Jesus of Nazareth is the new Tent of Meeting, the new Tabernacle, the new Temple. The Nazarene carpenter is glory in the flesh! The Friend of Sinners is the Shekinah Glory in human form! He is Glory breaking through from behind the shield. He is Glory come in such a way that we need not, like Moses hide in the cleft of a rock. He is Glory come in such a way that we can look and not be destroyed.*

This Advent season, look, look again, and yet again, and not be destroyed. What are some practical ways in which you can intentionally “look” at the glory of God—in other words, give God your attention and devotion?

On the fourth Sunday of Advent we light the love candle. This candle represents the love of God for us, his rebellious children. But God’s love for us provokes a response. Because he first loved us, we then love God and one another. The glory of God made into flesh transforms us. Ponder and give thanks for another passage from the pen of the apostle John.

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:7-12*

Consider how God has loved you. What are some ways you can love the people around you this Christmas in a manner that reflects the way you have been loved by God?

