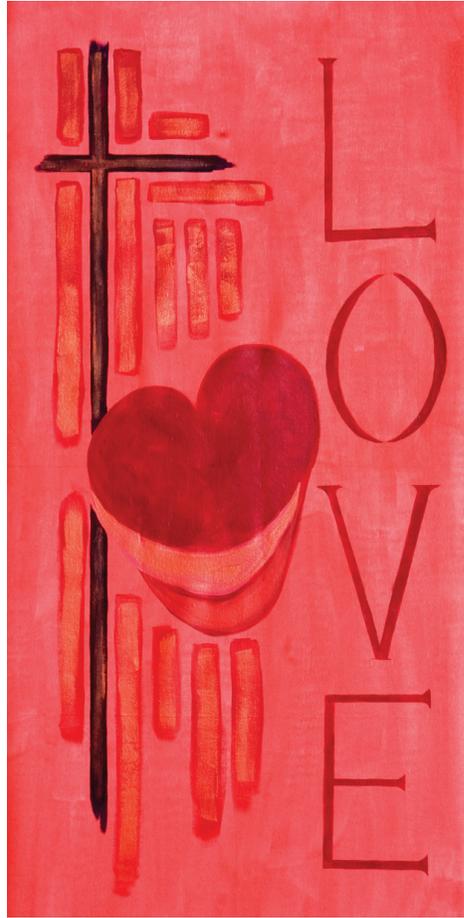
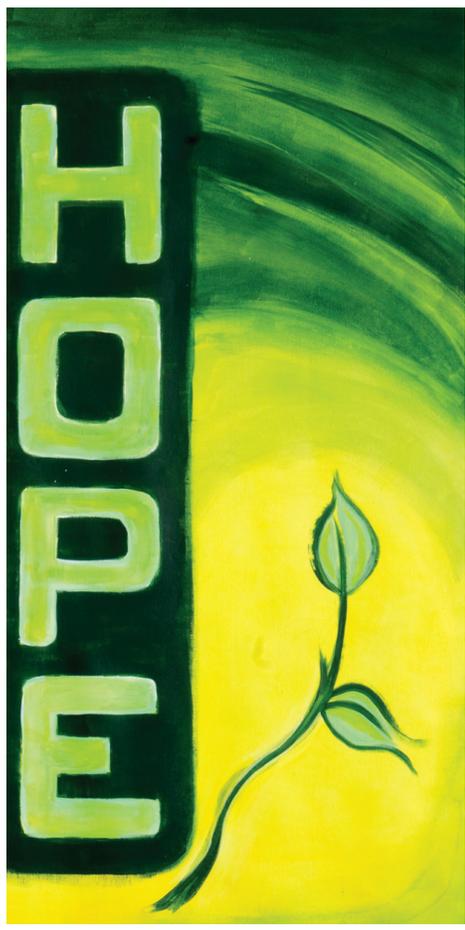
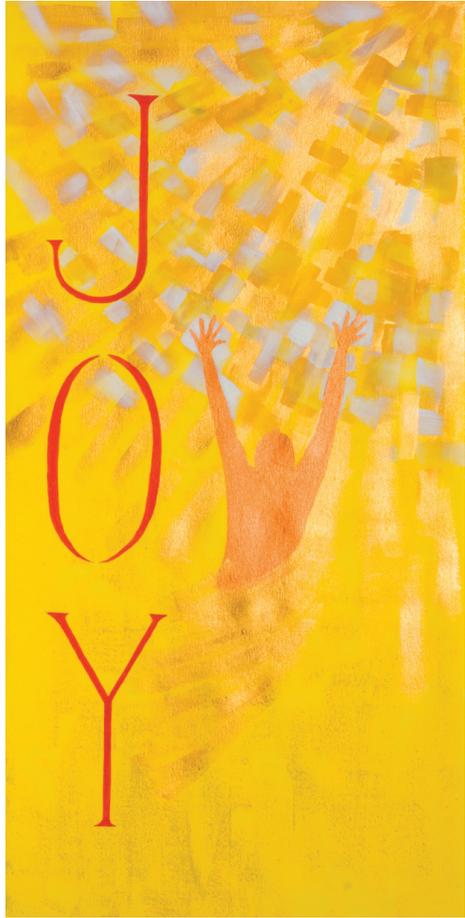


# Advent

Celebrating the Coming of Our Lord • Santa Barbara Community Church 2009



# Advent

*Celebrating the Coming of our Lord 2009*

## 2009 Advent Schedule

Sermon Date	Study	Topic	Schedule
11/29	1	Hope	homegroups meet
12/6	2	Peace	homegroups meet
12/13	3	Joy	individual study
12/20	4	Love	individual study

## The Study Guide

This study is broken into four parts. Each study will accompany the lighting of the Advent wreath on Sunday. The introduction can be read on your own during the week of Thanksgiving, when our homegroups are on break. The second two studies (1 and 2) will be studied together in homegroups. The last two studies are for individual/household use, as we will not be meeting in homegroups to discuss them.

May this Christmas season bring glory to God in our hearts, in our homes and in his Church!

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*The study guide was written by Steve Jolley and Mike Willbanks. The introduction was written by Christian Schalesky and Mike Willbanks. Claudia Cook created the Sanctuary banners after which the artwork is taken. Thanks to Carolee Peterson who helps to design our study guides.*



# Advent

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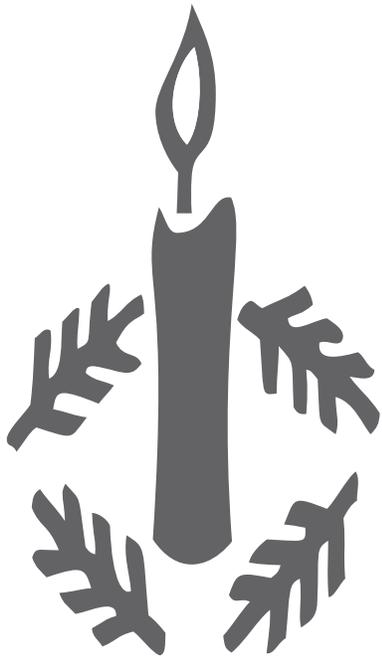
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# Advent

*Celebrating the Coming of our Lord 2009*



## *Introduction*

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son  
from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14*

For as long as humanity has been worshipping God, the changing seasons have served as sacred markers calling us to celebrate the Lord of all life. For centuries Jews have organized seasonal celebration around the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> As Christians, the focus of seasonal celebration revolves around the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of the Christian Church, the cycle of the liturgical year was instrumental in teaching the biblical stories of God's redemptive work in the world to a people shrouded in poverty, illiteracy and lack of education.<sup>2</sup>

The Advent season marks the beginning of the ecclesiastical year. It begins the 4th Sunday before Christmas and culminates in the celebration of the birth of Christ. The celebration of Advent is not a biblical mandate nor does it have a Scriptural precedent, yet it has a rich tradition in the Christian Church as a season of reflection upon the life, death, resurrection and future return of our Lord Jesus. This season, like all others, has worship of God as its purpose.

The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival."<sup>3</sup> The focus of the season is upon the birth of Christ in his First Advent and the future return of Christ in his Second Advent. The biblical Greek term is *parousia* which usually means "presence" but can also mean "coming" or "arrival." When we recognize Advent, therefore, we are not only mindful of the First and Second Advents of Christ but also his unique and powerful presence in our lives today. A focus on the past and the future must affect our lives in the here and now.

- 1 We see the Old Testament principle of seasonal celebration inaugurated by God in Exodus 12-13. Throughout its history Israel has recognized festivals, celebrations and holy days as reminders of God's goodness and faithfulness.
- 2 Prior to the 16th century the great majority of people were illiterate. In their ardent determination to instruct followers to read the Bible in their native language, leaders of the Reformation extended literacy to the masses. The invention of the printing press made widespread publication a reality.
- 3 Toon, p. 15.

## Celebration, Anticipation, Self-Examination

Advent is a time of celebration. The infinite and unknowable God of the universe became one of us that we might know him. He was born in a far away land into the humblest of circumstances for the express purpose of redeeming the world from sin and reconciling humanity to himself. It is a celebration of the Incarnation of Christ. And the Incarnation cannot be separated from the Crucifixion. The baby Jesus was born under the shadow of the cross. He not only came to teach, heal and perform wonders, but also to suffer, die and rise again. For us, the Incarnation is the bridge from death into life. (John 5: 24) This is cause for celebration!

The Advent season, however, is also (like unto the prophets of old) a time of anticipation. The Old Testament prophets, with eager awaiting and preparedness, foretold the coming of the Messiah. In the New Testament, their visions and signs were confirmed in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Today's 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.

## Messianic Psalms

This year, we will be approaching the celebration of Advent through the lens of several Messianic psalms. *Messianic* comes from the Hebrew word *mashiach*, and means *anointed one*. The term is used in the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) with reference to kings and priests who were traditionally anointed with oil to signify their calling by God. The term, though, began to be used with a future reference to point to one whom God would send to save his people once and for all. Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke writes,

Messianism originated not in the intertestamental period of later Judaism but in the kingly ideal of ancient Israel, as expressed in the royal psalms. When the Psalter was finally edited, the royal psalms, and that is most of them, became full blown messianic psalms. Representing the king visually and ideally to the people, they were always pregnant with messianic expectation, but after the Exile, when Israel was left without a king, they also had in hand this collection of royal psalms, robes waiting for a king worthy to wear them. A Messianic hue tints the entirety of the edited Psalter we have in hand.<sup>1</sup>

If one is looking for the Scriptural bedrock from which the Messianic hope arose, a good place to start

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<sup>1</sup> Waltke, p. 12. Emphasis added.

would be 2 Samuel 7:11-16 where the prophet Nathan declared to David,

*The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.*

We believe these promises (which so obviously could not be fulfilled in Solomon alone) along with those in the Messianic psalms which followed, find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. As we remember his first coming as a humble child and anticipate his next coming as a triumphant king, we are reminded anew that the Christian understanding of history is one bounded by hope, peace, joy and love. May God grant us these in abundance this Advent as we focus our attention on the coming of Jesus the Messiah!





## *Hope! Candle 1*

### **Psalm 89**

*We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. Psalm 33:20*

In 2004, Barack Obama was propelled into national prominence after delivering the keynote speech during the Democratic National Convention. In this speech, entitled *The Audacity of Hope*, he focused on this theme:

Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope! In the end, that is God's greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation. A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead.

Two years later, Obama released his book with the same title. And during the 2008 presidential campaign, "HOPE" was a word we often saw in large script on bumper stickers and memorable posters. It seems that for a country mired in an economic recession and a seven year war on terror, the promise of hope and change sounded good to many.

Hope is indeed one of God's greatest gifts, but it is not always so easy to come by. The Scriptures do not pretend otherwise. Often in the Bible we read of people who are experiencing heartache and difficulty, struggling to see how God's promises can be realized.

Psalm 89 is one of the longer psalms in the Psalter. There are three main parts to this psalm. Read each one and try to summarize it in a sentence or two before moving on to the next part.

Verses 1-18

Verses 19-37

Verses 38-51<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 52 is to be read as the concluding verse of the third book of psalms (Psalm 73 – 89) and as such should not be seen literally as a piece of Psalm 89.

The last section of this psalm is a jarring conclusion to the first two sections. Old Testament scholar Rolf Jacobson comments,

The psalm is a cry for help from a person or a people who believe that God is faithful, but who are in a position of pain from which it feels like God hasn't kept promises. Worse, they are in a position from which they cannot imagine how God could keep the promises.<sup>1</sup>

This situation is not unique in the Scriptures. Can you think of other instances in the Bible in which God's people found themselves in this place— not being able to imagine how God could deliver them and keep his promises? Share these with your homegroup.

Can you think of a time in your life when you felt hopeless? How did that affect your relationship with God?

We've just finished studying the book of Ezekiel as a church and so we should be somewhat familiar with the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) and the exile of the people of Judah. The city of Jerusalem lay in ruins for almost 150 years before Nehemiah leads the people to rebuild the city walls. It was about this time (ca. 450-430 BC) that the last Old Testament prophet spoke the word of God to the people. Then, silence from God... for over 400 years!

It is important that we remember this context as we begin the season of Advent. At the time of the birth of Christ, there had been no prophetic voice for centuries, the Davidic dynasty— the glory days of Israel— were a distant memory, and the Romans were the latest in a string of empires that had come to dominate the land of Israel. Yet some still remembered the promises of God and clung to the hope of God's salvation through a new *David*.

With this in mind, read Luke 1:26-38.

A baby in a manger who would grow up to live as a carpenter, and later an itinerant preacher, finally being killed by the Romans— this was not the sort of fulfillment of the Messianic promises that the Jews were looking for! How did the coming of Jesus fulfill the long awaited hopes of Israel?

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=12/21/2008&tab=5](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=12/21/2008&tab=5)

How does Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel relate to the promises and longings of Psalm 89? Share with your groups specific verses from Luke 1 that correspond to Psalm 89.

The angel tells Mary, *Nothing is impossible with God.* (v. 37) How does this speak to you? How does this encourage you to put your hope in God? Are there any specific things in your life or in the world that seem beyond hope?

Romans 4:16-25 sets forth Abraham as an archetype of one who hoped in God. What does it mean when it says, *Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...*? Why can we hope even when hope seems lost? What does this look like practically?

Notice how the keyword "hope" continues on through Romans 5:1-5. How does the Christian's suffering relate to our hope?

Just as the psalmist waits with unfulfilled promises and with the experience of the seeming absence of God, so we too wait for Christ to come again with longings for something more. This is not it. Though we have experienced something of God, a saving revelation of Christ, so we wait in the *not yet* for what is still to come.

How do you experience this longing for something more?

What will happen when Christ comes a second time? What hope is offered in Scripture to a world still wracked by disappointment and pain? How do the following verses give you hope?

Romans 8:18-25

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Revelation 21:1-5

Christ has come! Christ is coming again! And when he does, everything will be forever changed. This is our hope. Spend some time in prayer expressing to God your eager anticipation for the return of his beloved Son. Ask him to prepare your life for that glorious day.



## *Peace! Candle 2*

### **Psalm 2**

*The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace. Psalm 29:11*

You only need to pick up the newspaper in any city in the world to know that peace is in short supply. Every corner of the world is plagued by violence, animosity, hatred and warfare. Civil wars, drug cartel violence, nation pitted against nation, people groups at odds with one another for centuries, are the ongoing lot of humanity.

Peace is just as elusive on a personal level. Our neighborhoods, schools, churches and even our own families and homes are often caldrons of interpersonal tension and friction. This lack of peace begins in our own hearts. There is a conflict that wars inside each of us that has repercussions in all social interactions.

Despite the unsettling friction and unrest that plagues our world and our hearts, we pause this second Sunday of Advent to consider the One who brought peace. For the believer who has placed his or her trust in Jesus Christ, the celebration of the Christmas story reminds us that peace is a present reality. But Christmas is only a taste of peace. It is incomplete. We long for the time when Jesus will return and bring peace in all of its fullness.

As we are seeing in this Advent study, the Psalms often anticipate the coming of the *Anointed One* and the blessings that will accompany his arrival. In examining Psalm 2 in this study, we have the opportunity again to consider how the Messiah is the answer to our deepest longings for peace.

Read Psalm 2.

The Psalm begins with a question. *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?* This question might describe our world throughout the ages. Verses 1-3 point to a world without peace. How would you answer the question this Psalm begins with?

What is God's response to the rebellious and warlike nature of the nations?

Where do you find Jesus, the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6), in this Psalm? (*Christ* is Greek for the Hebrew *Anointed One*, v. 2). What role does Jesus play in bringing peace to the nations?

Alongside our consideration of Psalm 2 read the Christmas narrative in Matthew 1:18-2:12. In Matthew's telling of the birth of Jesus, the Magi and King Herod are at the center of the story. Both have vastly different reactions to the birth of Jesus. How do they respond differently?

King Herod

Magi

Compare the response of King Herod to those who set themselves against the Lord in Psalm 2.

*The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.* Psalm 2:2

How is Herod a picture of all people who struggle against the rule and reign of God?

What was he motivated by? How do you see the same motivation behind conflicts in the world today?

Can you describe a time in your life when you had a *Herod-like* reaction to Jesus?

The Magi, on the other hand, respond in worship to birth of Jesus. Compare the response of the Magi to Psalm 2:10-12. What does it mean to *Kiss the Son* and to *take refuge in him*?

When you *Kiss the Son* and *take refuge* in him how have you experienced peace?

In Isaiah's Messianic prophecy Jesus is described as the *Prince of Peace*.

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Isaiah 9:6

Why is *Prince of Peace* one of the titles of Christ? In what ways has Jesus brought peace to our world and to individuals?

In Scripture, *peace* is a favorite greeting found at the beginning and end of many New Testament letters. *Peace* (*shalom* in Hebrew; *eirene* in Greek) in the simplest, biblical sense can be considered *completeness*, *wholeness*, and *soundness*. It is not only expressed by cessation from war, but also in friendship between two people (Genesis 26:29; Psalm 28:3), and intimate relationship with God (Numbers 25:12; Isaiah 54:10). The very purpose of Christ coming into the world was to bring *peace* with God through redemption and reconciliation.

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand...*  
Romans 5:1-2a

Consider these New Testament passages and how they expand our understanding of how Christ brought peace and reconciliation to us. Pick your favorite from this list and be ready to share with your homegroup why it speaks to you.

John 14:27

John 16:33

Galatians 5:22

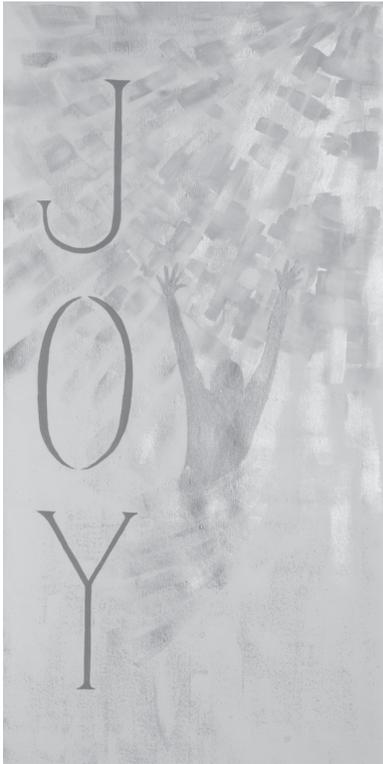
Ephesians 2:14-18

Philippians 4:7

Colossians 1:19-20

Christians look forward to a time when the Prince of Peace will return again and complete the work he began. Ponder as a homegroup what this peace will be like.

Take a moment and reflect upon what Christ has done in your life. Has knowing God through Christ brought *peace* to your life? How have you experienced this *peace*? Share this with your homegroup.



## Psalm 98

Christmas is about joy. Children giggle with the anticipation of presents, adults look forward to the warmth of family and friends, and even the cynical seem to put a smile on their face at Christmas. There is a sense, even in secular society, that something special is in the air. The Christian understands the reason for this— joy. For believers, the birth of Christ is a special time to ponder how the Christ-child has brought joy into our lives.

Read Psalm 98. This Psalm looks forward to the joy that all the earth will share when Christ comes.

What are the reasons for joy that you see in Psalm 98?

How does the Psalm instruct us to respond in joy?

*Joy! Candle 3*

In observing Advent, we are considering both the first coming of Christ and his second coming when he will complete his work. One of the more famous Christmas carols, *Joy to the World*, was actually written as a song about the second coming of Christ. Isaac Watts wrote this hymn (in 1719) about the second coming based on Psalm 98. When Christ comes a second time, as the stanza has it, *The Savior reigns!* The result is Joy!

*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.*

Everywhere you look in the Christmas story you see joy. The ponderous Mary, the surprised shepherds, and the wise Simeon all respond with joy.

Read Luke 1:46-56. Mary's poem, called *The Magnificat*, is her joyful response to what is about to transpire in her body. What reasons for joy does Mary give?

The shepherds seem to be blue-collar workers minding their own business when a quiet night is interrupted with an amazing angelic announcement.

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."  
Luke 2:10-11*

Once again we find joy with the advent of Jesus. Why?

One often overlooked character in the drama surrounding the birth of Jesus is Simeon. Read Luke 2:21-32. In this passage, Joseph and Mary bring their newborn son to the Temple for dedication. Here they encounter a pious man named Simeon. Simeon's response to Jesus is an echo of Psalm 98. Why is Simeon joyful when he sees Jesus?

In light of Psalm 98 and the Luke passages we have looked at, examine your own life. How are you experiencing the joy of knowing this Messiah Jesus who has come into our world?

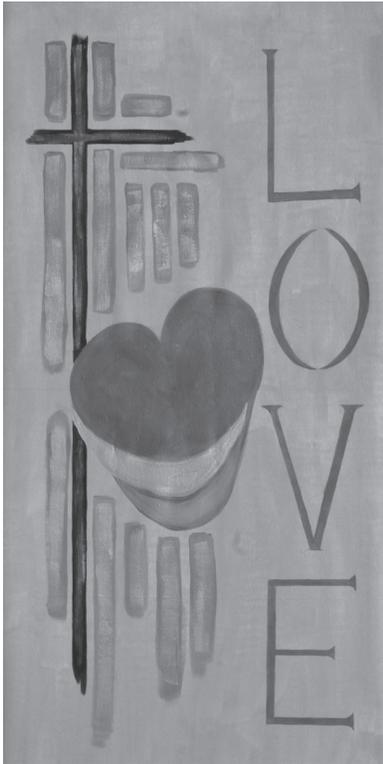
If you're having a difficult time with this, how can you fight for joy this advent season?

Ponder the last two stanzas of *Joy to the World* below. How are these joyous proclamations realized in the first and next coming of Jesus? Pray that God would give you joy in these things that would transcend anything else that happens in our lives.

*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.*

*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.*





## *Love! Candle 4*

### **Psalm 45**

*Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever!* Psalm 136:1

The Bible is a love story. It is a sweeping drama from beginning to end about a loving God wooing his Beloved and overcoming all obstacles to be with her. It has often been noted that the Scriptures begin and end with the picture of a wedding, first in the Garden of Eden and lastly with the new Jerusalem *coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* (Revelation 21:2) And everywhere in between there are signs of God's overwhelming love for His people. It is often a broken hearted love— the sort known by one whose lover has been unfaithful. But nevertheless, God's undying love (or perhaps more correctly, his love to the point of death) relentlessly pursues the bride of his affection.

Psalm 45 is an unusual psalm. It is a royal psalm composed for a wedding. Scholar Gerald Wilson notes,

The continued inclusion of a such a specifically royal psalm in a postexilic Psalter must have become a mysterious anachronism unless new ways of interpreting it had developed. One possible way forward was to understand the wedding as that between God as groom and Israel as his bride. The messianic overtones of such a passage embodied Israel's continuing hopes for a Davidic descendant who would usher in the eternal kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

Read Psalm 45. Notice that half of it is directed to the king and half to the bride.

What messianic expectations would this psalm have inspired? In other words, what would this psalm lead the Jews to expect from the coming Anointed One?

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, p. 700.

Where do you find yourself in this psalm? (If you're not sure, see Ephesians 5:28-32.) What do the words to the bride tell us about ourselves? Notice especially v. 11. How does it make you feel to know God is so madly in love with you? What does it mean for you to *forget your father's house and to honor (NIV) or bow (ESV) to him?*

In light of this picture of a royal wedding, read Luke 2:1-20. Here we find an engaged couple, but they are not the fulfillment of the couple in Psalm 45. The fulfillment comes in the baby boy to whom the pregnant teen gives birth. He is the One! He has come! This is the long-awaited King. But he is not just a son of David. He is the Son of God who has come in flesh to redeem and purify us, his people!

Savor the following verses. Then write a brief prayer, praising God for his great love and offering yourself to him in love again.

John 1:14-18

John 3:16

Ephesians 5:25-27

1 John 4:9

*The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell  
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win  
His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin*

*When years of time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall  
When men who hear, refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call  
God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong  
Redeeming grace to Adam's race- the saints' and angels' song*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky*

*The love of God...How rich and pure! How measureless and strong!  
It shall forever more endure- the saints' and angels' song.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The hymn "The Love of God" was written in 1917 by Frederick Lehman. The magnificent third verse, however, is actually a paraphrase of a famous 11th century poem called *Hadamut* written in Aramaic by Rabbi Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai.