

Bible Reading Guide

Week 1 He Will Come Again in Glory

Nov. 29	Revelation 1:4-9; 19:11-16; 21:1-5, 22-27; 22:1-5
Nov. 30	Zechariah 9:9-17; Romans 5:3-5; 8:18-30
Dec. 1	John 1:1-5, 14; Revelation 22:12-13, 20
Dec. 2	Mark 13:24-37; Luke 21:25-28
Dec. 3	2 Peter 3:8-15
Dec. 4	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
Dec. 5	1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Week 2 God's Presence and His Promises

Dec. 6	Exodus 1:1-3:10
Dec. 7	Psalms 46, 112
Dec. 8	Isaiah 2:1-5
Dec. 9	Isaiah 40:1-11
Dec. 10	Isaiah 64:1-9
Dec. 11	Isaiah 9:2; John 1:4-5, 9
Dec. 12	Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7

Week 3 Immanuel: God with Us

Dec. 13	Matthew 1:1-17
Dec. 14	Luke 1:5-25
Dec. 15	Luke 1:26-38
Dec. 16	Matthew 1:18-24
Dec. 17	Luke 1:39-56
Dec. 18	Isaiah 9:2-7; 40:1-5; Luke 1:57-80; 3:1-6
Dec. 19	Luke 2:1-7

Week 4 A Savior Is Born

Dec. 20	Luke 2:8-20
Dec. 21	Luke 2:22-38
Dec. 22	Matthew 2:1-12
Dec. 23	Matthew 2:1-18; 1 John 3:8
Dec. 24	John 1:1-18
Dec. 25	Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:4-7; 1 Peter 1:3-5, 13

WEEK 4
A SAVIOR
IS BORN

BIBLE STUDY

1. The shepherds, Simeon, Anna, Herod, and the Magi each had different responses to Jesus. How would you summarize their responses in a word or a phrase? What do you find most compelling or convicting about each?

2. Read **Luke 2:8–38**. Scripture is clear that both the shepherds and Anna almost immediately began telling others about Jesus. How does their natural response of evangelism inspire you? Are there people God is bringing to mind whom you can tell about Jesus?

3. Read **Matthew 2:1–12**. What does the Magi’s worship of Jesus reveal about the gospel and the nature of God’s kingdom? Why is their worship significant?

4. Read **Matthew 2:13–18**. Anthony Carter describes this scene as “the brutal and blunt reminder of why Jesus came into the world in the first place.” In your own words, why does this event belong in our remembrance of the Christmas story? What do we miss if we overlook it?

5. Read **John 1:1–18 and Philippians 2:6–11**. As you ponder the Incarnation, what sparks questions, wonder, or praise? How does it kindle hope?

6. As you reflect on this Advent journey, how has your understanding of hope changed? How have you experienced a deepened hope in your daily life?

**MY EYES HAVE SEEN
YOUR SALVATION,
WHICH YOU HAVE
PREPARED IN THE
SIGHT OF ALL
NATIONS: A LIGHT
FOR REVELATION TO
THE GENTILES AND
THE GLORY OF YOUR
PEOPLE ISRAEL.**

Luke 2:30–32

Week 4

A Savior is Born

Christ was born into a world of pain and darkness. This week, we consider the hope of the Incarnation as we reflect on the stories of those who interacted with the newborn Savior. And we consider the hope Advent offers in our own experiences of pain and darkness as we trust in the one who was, who is, and who is to come.



MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION, WHICH YOU HAVE PREPARED
IN THE SIGHT OF ALL NATIONS: A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE
GENTILES AND THE GLORY OF YOUR PEOPLE ISRAEL.

Luke 2:30-32

12/24 ADVENT ANEW

BY MARLENA GRAVES

John 1:1-18

**THE WORD BECAME
FLESH AND MADE HIS
DWELLING AMONG US.
WE HAVE SEEN HIS
GLORY, THE GLORY OF
THE ONE AND ONLY
SON, WHO CAME FROM
THE FATHER, FULL OF
GRACE AND TRUTH.**

John 1:14

The Word—the source of creation, the true light—entered humanity as a helpless babe born in humble circumstances. From a human perspective, Jesus’ birth is quite shocking. Why didn’t he, the God-man, first appear as a strapping young man flexing his divine muscles with spectacular feats for all to see? Angels could have trumpeted his coming throughout the whole world! But they didn’t; an angel choir lit the night sky for only a few isolated shepherds.

Contrast Jesus’ advent with first-century Roman generals arriving in town with fanfare and flourish after a military victory. They wanted to see and be seen, aiming to impress as they displayed power and demanded homage. Jesus came quietly and unobtrusively, demanding nothing.

Jesus’ mode of arrival, his life among Jewish peasants, and his eventual execution as a criminal certainly seem like a counterintuitive plan for persuading the world that he’s the Messiah. Yet John asserts: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14).

The glory John testifies to doesn’t comport with our human conceptions of glory and power. While the disciples witnessed many miraculous examples of Christ’s power, in John’s gospel the greatest demonstration of Jesus’ glory is *the Cross*. Jesus himself makes this plain: “‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified . . . And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die” (12:23, 32–33).

The shocking humility of the manger points us toward the humiliation of the cross. This is our strange and otherworldly hope: The Word who was born as a helpless infant is the Savior who came to die a criminal’s death—for us. When we receive him, John says, we enter into his light and life.

Sometimes I find myself among Jesus’ followers who still wrestle with questions (see Matt. 28:17; Mark 9:24; John 20:24–29). When I do, I turn back to John 1:14. The disciples had seen and been with Jesus. They’d eaten with him, traveled with him, fished with him, laughed with him, grieved with him—with *God, face to face*. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus so profoundly transformed them that they were willing to abandon everything to suffer and even die for Jesus. That reality quells my doubts.

I also think about the miracle we celebrate this Christmas Eve: Jesus, the babe in the manger who was “in very nature God” yet “made himself nothing” for us (Phil. 2:6–7). I think of the Christ child who grew up to die and rise again for my sins, offer me true hope, and make all things new. In those moments, Jesus, Faithful and True, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, appears to me afresh (Rev. 19:11; John 14:6). Advent anew.

CONTEMPLATE JOHN 1:1-18. (Optionally, also read John 12:23–36 and Philippians 2:6–11.) Ponder the mystery and glory of the Incarnation. What spiritual responses—like worship, trust, hope—are stirred up in you?



QUINA ARAGON is an author and spoken word artist. Her children's books include *Love Made* and, forthcoming, *Love Gave* (February 2021).



MARLENA GRAVES is a writer and adjunct professor. She is the author of *The Way Up Is Down* and *A Beautiful Disaster*.



ANTHONY CARTER is lead pastor of East Point Church in East Point, Georgia. His books include *Running from Mercy* and *Black and Reformed*.

ADVENT: LIVING HOPE

Copyright © 2020 Christianity Today.
All rights reserved.

Christianity Today
465 Gundersen Dr.
Carol Stream, IL 60188

ChristianityToday.com

EDITOR IN CHIEF Daniel Harrell
PUBLISHER Jacob Walsh
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Ted Olsen
CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER Erik Petrik
CREATIVE DIRECTOR Alecia Sharp
PROJECT EDITOR Kelli B. Trujillo
ILLUSTRATOR AND DESIGNER Jared Boggess
COPY EDITORS Alexandra Mellen, Tracey Moore
MARKETING Leanne Snavelly, Katie Bracy

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (RSV) are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (FT) are from The First Testament, copyright © 2018 John Goldingay. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All photos courtesy of the contributor. Quina Aragon photo by Savannah Lauren.

ADVENT **Living Hope**

Ideas For Families

SELECT SOME OF THESE IDEAS TO ENRICH YOUR FAMILY'S JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT.

Throughout Advent

- With teens or preteens, read and discuss the devotions together each evening. With younger kids, focus on just the Scripture passages and reflection prompts.
- Create a hope-focused “stained-glass window” that you’ll add to throughout Advent. Use a dry-erase marker (or a colored self-adhesive note) to write the word *hope* in the center of a window in your home. Use a thesaurus together to find and add related words that can help us understand biblical hope. Then, throughout Advent, use colored markers or notes to record words, ideas, images, symbols, or Bible verses from each day’s discussion and add them to the window.

Week 1

- Invite teens or preteens to read “Hope: An Expectant Leap” by Jay Y. Kim, then go on a challenging hike together. As you walk, discuss Kim’s hiking story and the idea that Christian hope is something that’s gritty and determined.
- With younger children, have fun using a joke book to tell each other silly knock-knock jokes. Afterward, talk about the idea that Jesus will one day *arrive*. He will come again!
- Ask, “What are some things in life that upset you, are unfair, or make you feel angry or hopeless?” (Optional: Use newspapers or online news sites to generate ideas regarding current events.) Record on a posterboard some of the evils, injustices, and painful realities of life, like war, abuse, cancer, poverty, racism, stress, personal conflicts, and so on. Then tear up the poster together as you talk about our ultimate hope in Christ’s future reign described in Revelation 21:1-5.

Week 2

- Find an online recipe for air-dry or no-bake salt dough, then use it to make simple Christmas tree ornaments as a family. The ornaments will need to dry for one or more days. Use the experience of waiting for the dough to harden as an opportunity to talk about Advent as a season of waiting. What were God's people in the Old Testament waiting for? How do we see hope in their waiting?
- Use a telescope or binoculars to look at far-off objects. Discuss how God used prophets like Isaiah to see some of what God would do in the future. Talk about some of the truths Isaiah foretold about Jesus.
- Turn off the lights in your house (other than Christmas tree lights) to play flashlight tag or flashlight hide-and-seek. Have fun together, then read Isaiah 9:2 and John 1:4-5, 9. Discuss Christ's identity as the light promised in Isaiah 9.

Week 3

- Play a quiet game to see who can be silent the longest. (Or challenge everyone to be silent for a set period of time.) Use this experience to discuss what Zechariah might have thought and felt during his long period of muteness as he waited for his son's birth and the coming of the Messiah.
- Have an upside-down dinner as a family. Sit under the table, wear clothing backward, eat food in reverse order, and so on. Use this silly experience to talk about how Mary's song pointed toward the upside-down nature of the kingdom. Discuss some of Jesus' teachings and actions that turned things upside down (the first shall be last, love your enemies, and so on).
- Go on a "choice drive" as a family to look at area Christmas lights. At each intersection, let a different family member choose if you'll turn right, turn left, or go straight. Afterward, use this experience to talk about the choices and decisions that Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph faced. How might they have felt in these situations? What motivated their choices or responses? What can we learn from them?

Week 4

- Reflect on the shepherds' and Anna's immediate response to seeing baby Jesus—telling others about him! Create a Christmas card as a family that tells about Jesus, then mail it to someone to share the Good News.
- Gather a baby picture of each family member. (If possible, even include baby pictures of grandparents and great-grandparents.) Look at the pictures and discuss each person's traits you may recognize even when they were babies. Use this experience to talk about how remarkable it was that Simeon and Anna recognized baby Jesus as the promised Messiah.
- Gather around your hope-focused stained-glass window and reflect together on the entire Advent season. How has everyone's understanding of Christian hope been enriched? What is one idea, verse, or biblical story that stands out most to each family member? How was each person's faith impacted through this experience of observing Advent together?