



# Advent

BE EMPTIED. BE FILLED. BE LED. BE LIGHT.





I “played” baseball when I was a kid. I was terrible. I never got a hit. I don’t say that as an exaggeration. I mean, I NEVER got a hit. Not once. I came close one time because my bat actually connected with the ball and it went into left field. By that time, I was so conditioned to get up to the plate, swing three times, and walk back to the dugout, I didn’t know what to do. I stood at homebase, dumbstruck. When I finally realized what had happened, I started running for first. But, I was easily thrown out. So, my one opportunity at getting a hit ended in failure. Why? I had been to practice and I had run to first base many times. It wasn’t for lack of knowledge or lack of understanding that I didn’t get on base. I simply wasn’t prepared.



## HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST?

For thousands of years, the Church's answer has been Advent. The early Christians, like their Jewish families, used seasons of the year to observe festivals and holidays. These were invitations into the sacred promises of God. Although the Jewish people would keep time around the Exodus, the Church's calendar would center on the life and ministry of Jesus. Advent is the start of the Christian calendar and it marks the time we prepare for the coming of Christ.

Scott Daniels, a Nazarene theologian, says, "In a world where the pace of life continually speeds up, where everything has to come fast, and where attention spans are rapidly declining, it might be wonderfully transformative and counterformative to spend four weeks every year intentionally seeking to be shaped by the patient endurance of God." What does it mean to be shaped by God's endurance or God's patience? Here are some of the things it may mean: 1) Be Emptied, 2) Be Filled, 3) Be Led, 4) Be Light. In every case, we are implored to simply BE.

***"The function of Advent is to remind us what we are waiting for as we go through life too busy with things that do not matter to remember the things that do." - Joan Chittister***

***"Advent is the recovery of how to live in a world of impatience as a patient people." - Stanley Hauerwas***



## GUIDELINES

Part of the season of Advent is pushing back on the influx of activity. So, we don't want you to see this guide as one more thing on your to-do list. We are merely inviting you to create some space in your schedule by setting down the device, turning off the TV, or avoiding the next store. We're asking you to subtract some activity so you can focus on Christ this season.

This is not designed to be burdensome. We are only asking that you set aside one night of the week to sit down as a family or with a group of friends and: 1) light the Advent Candles for that week (see Advent Wreath Appendix), 2) go through the reading, and 3) discuss some of the questions. This can take as much or as little time as you want. The amount of space is not our focus. Our goal is simply to help you prepare for the arrival of Christ in your life.

In this guide you will find two tracks. One geared toward family reading and the other that adds more depth and context. If you're doing the reading with your family, you may want to just read the family section together. The "Going Deeper" section can be read on your own time or by people using this guide for their life group.

If you would like daily Advent readings or if you are interested in more information regarding the season of Advent, please see the below links.

**Advent Information:**

[Advent and the Winter of Our Disenchantment](#)

<http://www.seedbed.com/joy-to-the-world-a-reflection-on-advent/>

<http://www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html>

[Somebody Make it Stop! Finding Advent as the Reset Button for Life](#)

<http://www.seedbed.com/celebrating-advent-as-family/>

**Daily Scripture Readings for Advent:**

[This is the Community Reading](#)

[For the Creative Type:](#)

[Wesleyan.org Advent Devotional](#)

[Vanderbilt Lectionary](#)

[Desiring God - Good News of Great Joy](#)

[Christ Community Church 2015 Advent Resources](#)



## WEEK ONE - BE EMPTIED

*LUKE 2:6-7 | While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

### **FAMILY READING**

In this story, Jesus came in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn. Even though Mary was pregnant and there were signs of a coming baby, Bethlehem had not prepared to welcome it's King. We see in this story that part of our preparation is creating space in our homes for the coming of Jesus. It seems as though Jesus will arrive where there is room for Him - even if the only room for Him is in a stable away from the noise.

### **FAMILY DISCUSSION**

1. Describe a recent day that was too full. What did you have going on? Did you get it all done? What does it feel like to have more to do in a day than is possible to do?
2. What are the things that bring on stress for you during this holiday season? For example: obligations, gift buying, family commitments, Finances...etc.
3. What are some things we can let go of to create space to welcome Jesus?

## **GOING DEEPER**

1 Thessalonians 5:2, Matthew 24:36-44

Advent is not Christmas. It is the promise BEFORE Christmas. It is “not yet.” Advent, therefore, is about leaning in to what God said God would do. It is expecting something that has yet to come. So, we not only look to the first coming of Christ as an answer to the promises of old, we strain our eyes to the second coming of Christ and pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, Come!” Here, we get a peek at the end of our story. Sure, Advent has shepherds, and angels, and stars. But, there are also images of two men walking in a field and one disappearing. There are warnings that Christ will come like a thief in a night.

Maybe we could learn to hear those scriptures in a positive light. Perhaps we need Jesus to be a Holy Thief that silently ravishes our household, carrying off all of our stuff. Usually our preparation for Christmas entails Christmas wish-lists and secret desires. What if, by way of preparation, we made a list of things we need Jesus to come and take from us instead of a list of things we want Santa to bring to us?

### **GOING DEEPER DISCUSSION:**

The text above mentioned Jesus as a Holy Thief.

1. What does Jesus need to steal from you because you are unwilling to let go of it yourself? (People pleasing, Pride, Desire to make perfect memories, Pain from the past, Family roles and identity, etc.)
2. Why is being emptied so uncomfortable?
3. What is one tangible thing you will empty from your life this week?



## WEEK TWO - BE FILLED

*LUKE 2:8-12 | And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

### **FAMILY READING**

We don't often see mangers in every-day life. So it is easy to romantically lock them in snow globes and magical Christmas movies. When we do this, we miss just how ordinary and unspectacular they were in the time of Jesus. A manger was a feeding trough for animals. You found them in barns and in shepherd's caves. A manger was probably the least likely place for a King to be born. Yet, we see in this story that Jesus is placed in an ordinary manger. While that happens, an empty sky is filled with angels and the glory of the Lord surrounds a group of noname shepherds.

One of the most spectacular aspects of this season is the belief that our ordinary lives can be FILLED with the presence of Christ. We might feel unimportant or small. Well, you can't be more unimportant than a

manger! Remember that Jesus wants to come into your actual, ordinary, unimportant, life. This Advent, let's not only be emptied of the business and stress. Let's be filled with Jesus.

## **FAMILY DISCUSSION**

1. Where have you seen God in your life this week? Make a list (Perhaps in a kind word, a surprising gift, forgiveness after a fight, a beautiful sunset, the laughter of children).
2. Why is it difficult to notice the God's presence in our ordinary lives?
3. Do you believe that Jesus lives inside of you? How does this belief impact your daily life?

## **GOING DEEPER**

1 Thessalonians 5:2, Matthew 24:36-44

What did Mary do to become pregnant? She was a virgin. God came to her and told her that she was going to be filled with life and all Mary had to do was say "yes." I wonder how many of us hear the words of God, "be filled." And our response is "not right now, I'm a bit busy" or "perhaps you have the wrong person because I'm not a suitable house for the Spirit of Christ." Whatever the reason, we often refuse the offer to be filled. This Advent, don't refuse.

One way for our hearts to be opened is to allow someone to pray for us. Remember, Jesus was LAID in the manger by Mary. Perhaps we need

someone to “lay” Jesus in our lives by praying for our receptivity and for the coming of Christ. This is not a forceful thrusting of Jesus into our lives. It is a tender, gentle laying of Christ in the space that is made available to Him. Below, is a poem written by Malcolm Guite. In many ways, it is an advent prayer. Perhaps you could allow someone to read it to you and you could hear it as a prayer for God to wrap Himself in your “rags of time.”

*O Emmanuel*

*O come, O come, and be our God-with-us*

*O long-sought With-ness for a world without,*

*O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.*

*Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name*

*Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,*

*O quickened little wick so tightly curled,*

*Be folded with us into time and place,*

*Unfold for us the mystery of grace*

*And make a womb of all this wounded world.*

*O heart of heaven beating in the earth,*

*O tiny hope within our hopelessness*

*Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,*

*To touch a dying world with new-made hands*

*And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.*

[- Click Here to view Malcolm Guite video](#)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between our response to God's grace and God filling us with His Spirit?
2. What is the role of other people in our receptivity to God's filling?
3. Is there a line from the above poem that sticks out to you? Which one? Why?
4. Who do you trust to "lay Jesus" into your life? Invite them to pray for you this week.



## WEEK THREE - BE LED

*LUKE 2:8-12 | After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."*

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:*

*"'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.'*

*Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."*

*After they had heard the king, 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. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

## **FAMILY READING**

One of the more entertaining things in my baseball career was watching the base-coaches give signals. They would try to communicate things like “steal a base,” or, “bunt the ball,” with a hand to their belt or a touch to the brim of their hat. I think we can sometimes approach the continuous ways God breaks into our lives the same way we look at baseball team signals. They are hidden or secret and they are only meant for the insiders, people like clergy, wise-men, or those with lots of time on their hands to become “prayer-warriors.” I think sometimes we even believe that God gives signals just to throw people off who are untrained in the way He works. It is as though we believe God’s will for our lives is some big mystery that we have to look to the sky to decipher - like a wise man who studies the stars.

But, what if God’s plan for us was simple? What if He just wants Jesus to be the king of our hearts? I’m afraid we often ignore this obvious will of God in search for some deeper meaning for our lives. The wise men came to worship a king. Herod refused the message of a new king because he wanted to be king. It’s that simple: Are we wise or are we Herod?

## FAMILY DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to call Jesus your king?
2. Give one example from your behavior this past week of when you chose Jesus as your king instead of your own desires (it can be a big example or something like refilling someone's drink for them).
3. Why is it so difficult to give up your own ideas about the way things should go and choose to accept God's way?

## GOING DEEPER - PSALM 45

[Click here to read Psalm 45](#)

***“Psalm 45...shows us so many aspects of the Nativity we could never get from the carols or even (easily) from the gospels.” (C.S. Lewis, “Reflections on the Psalms”)***

“...the image of marriage, of sexual union, is not only profoundly natural but almost inevitable as a means of expressing the desired union between God and man...and the bride becomes the Church...It is this which has, like the unworthy bride in Ezekiel, been rescued, washed, clothed, and married by God...Read in this sense, the Psalm restores Christmas to its proper complexity. The birth of Christ is the arrival of the great warrior and the great king. Also of the Lover, the Bridegroom, whose beauty surpasses that of man...(certainly the image of a Child in a manger by no means suggests to us a king, giant-killer, bridegroom, and father. But, it would not suggest the eternal Word either - if we

didn't know)...Then the poet turns to the Bride, with the exhortation, 'forget also thine own people and thy father's house' (11)...But all this has also its poignant relevance when the Bride is the Church....To be called out of nature into the supernatural life is at first (or perhaps not quite at first - the wrench of the parting may be felt later) a costly honour. Even to be called from one natural level to another is loss as well as gain. Man has difficulties and sorrows which the other primates escape. But to be called up higher still costs still more. 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house', said God to Abraham (Genesis 12,1). It is a terrible command." (C.S. Lewis, "Reflections on the Psalms")

The above selections come from "Reflections on the Psalms" by C.S. Lewis. They set the stage for us by helping us think about Jesus as our Lord. We don't often see a baby in the manger as our coming King. But, in the backdrop of the Nativity, I would like you to hear Jesus saying "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Also, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me" (John 12:26).

### **GOING DEEPER DISCUSSION**

1. Why do you think God wants to be Lord of our lives?
2. Are there any areas of your life over which you are refusing the Lordship of Jesus? Which ones?
3. What is one practical step to make Jesus Lord over that area?



## WEEK FOUR - BE LIGHT

*LUKE 2:8-20 | And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

*So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

## **FAMILY READING**

It's no secret. The world is a pretty dark place. There are wars, robberies, lies, hateful hearts, and all manner of bad things around us. The season of Advent takes place right after the winter solstice (when the night is the longest). This means we begin Advent when the world is at its darkest - literally. This is not an accident. In the midst of the darkness, we light candles and fix our eyes on the light. That light may not be 100 watts but it's enough light to see our living room or our kitchen. Think about it. There is no darkness that is more powerful than a little candle. Your light is stronger than any darkness you encounter!

As we've continued on this journey, we've lit more and more candles, which provide more and more light to our room. When candles come together, they offer more light than when they are by themselves. The light we experience in our own homes is not meant to stay in our homes. When our candle-lit living room joins with the other living rooms in our church, we shine bright! Then we are able to bring that light into a dark world.

As the shepherds watched their sheep, one angel lit up the sky with an announcement. Then, that angel was joined by a multitude. Imagine the whole night sky lit up by a heavenly host! The shepherds were illuminated by the angels and their message - "a king is born!" What was their response? They told everybody! Let's shine like shepherds.

## FAMILY DISCUSSION

1. What are some ways we can fix our eyes on the “light” instead of only noticing the “darkness” in our world?
2. How does light get spread throughout the world?
3. Can you name someone who could use a little light in their lives?  
Write them a letter or give them a call to spread the light!

## GOING DEEPER

[John 1:1-5, 9-13](#)

Watch this video: [Oh Light | Gungor ft. All Sons and Daughters](#)

John expects us to believe that people saw light but didn't recognize it? How in the world does a person see a light and not know it is a light? I think this question deserves some exploration. Perhaps people didn't recognize the light because they weren't accustomed to seeing the light.

Our eyes can play tricks on us. We tend to see what we can understand rather than understand what we can see. Philip Yancey speaks of the reaction of native look-outs on the tip of South America when Magellan's boats rounded the continent. Their reaction surprised the fierce explorers. They were used to being feared or even revered. But, completely ignored was a new phenomenon.

***“Apparently, Magellan's odd vessels, manned by the strangely clad and strangely hued Spanish, did not compute to the locals, who sailed in canoes. The native population simply had no experiential reference***

*points to make sense of what their eyes recorded. So, they later explained, they just assumed the strange sighting was an apparition and, without speaking to each other about it, went about their lives as if nothing had changed.” - Philip Yancey | [Click Here to view quote](#)*

We don't have a point of reference for the light of Christ. Our eyes are used to darkness. It is all too easy to assume the “strange sighting was an apparition” and just go about our lives as normal. If we are going to notice the light that has broken into our lives, we're going to have to practice paying attention to it and speaking about it with other people. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

### **GOING DEEPER DISCUSSION**

1. Why do people choose darkness?
2. What could this phrase mean: our eyes are accustomed to darkness?
3. How do our eyes get accustomed to darkness (be specific)?
4. How do we change to get accustomed to light instead (be specific)?
5. Can we expect to share the light with other people if we are not walking in the light? Why/Why not?



## APPENDIX | THE ADVENT WREATH

The Advent wreath is an increasingly popular symbol of the beginning of the Church year in many churches as well as homes. It is a circular evergreen wreath (real or artificial) with five candles, four around the wreath and one in the center. Since the wreath is symbolic and a vehicle to tell the Christmas story, there are various ways to understand the symbolism. The exact meaning given to the various aspects of the wreath is not as important as the story to which it invites us to listen, and participate.

The circle of the wreath reminds us of God Himself, His eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end. The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness,

of renewal, of eternal life. Candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of His son. The four outer candles represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent, which themselves symbolize the four centuries of waiting between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Christ.

The light of the candles itself becomes an important symbol of the season. The light reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world that comes into the darkness of our lives to bring newness, life, and hope. It also reminds us that we are called to be a light to the world as we reflect the light of God's grace to others (Isa 42:6). The progression in the lighting of the candles symbolizes the various aspects of our waiting experience. As the candles are lighted over the four week period, it also symbolizes the darkness of fear and hopelessness receding and the shadows of sin falling away as more and more light is shed into the world. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshippers that something is happening, and that more is yet to come. Finally, the light that has come into the world is plainly visible as the Christ candle is lighted at Christmas, and worshippers rejoice over the fact that the hope and promise of long ago have been realized.

Above information adapted from [www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html](http://www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html)

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The mission of Lynchburg First Church of the Nazarene is to Love God, love others, and serve both. This Advent guide is meant to help you along in your discipleship journey. Thank you for downloading the guide. We pray that God richly bless you through the content in this book. Merry Christmas from the LFCN family.

