



AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

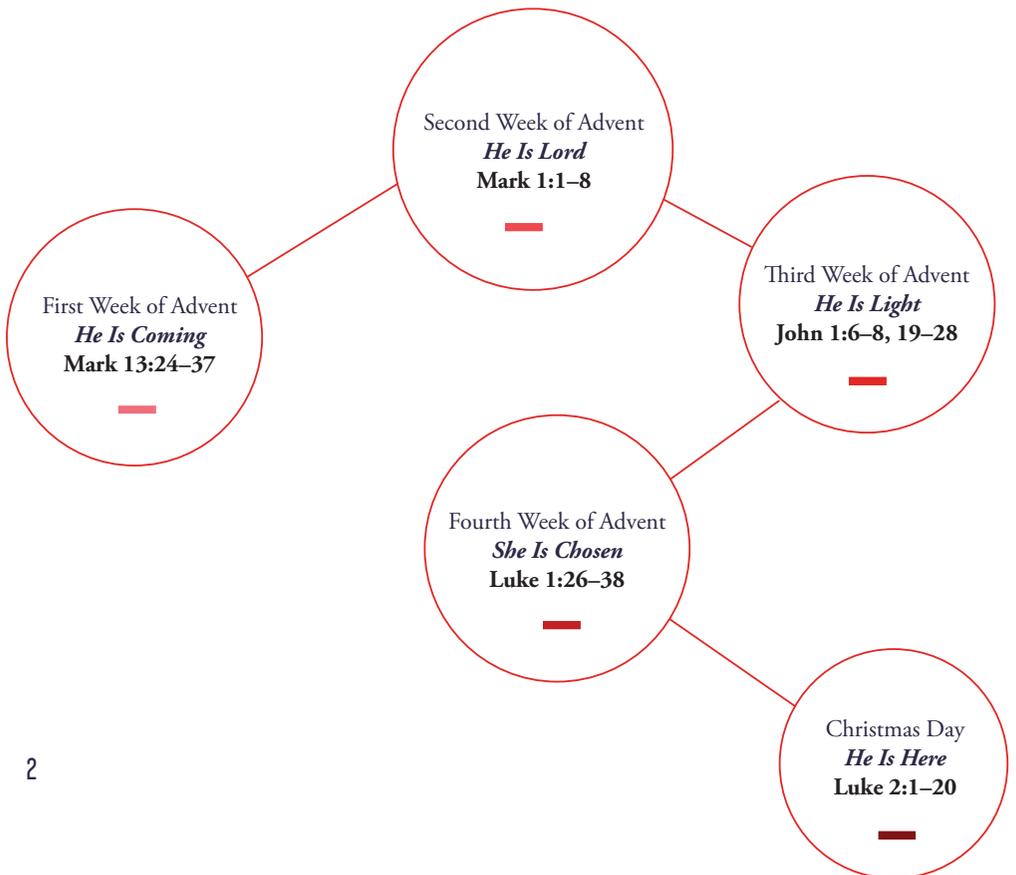
Long
Expected
Jesus

SAMPLE
INSIDE!

Long-Expected Jesus

AT A GLANCE

Each **Sunday of Advent** introduces the week's theme:



Each **weekly prayer** draws from hymns and psalms.

Come to the Table invites you to gather together in community for a meal, whether among family or friends. Each Sunday contains a short reflection and discussion questions to share with the group.

While around the table, families or groups can engage in **Family Time**. In addition to the discussion questions are a family activity and suggested memory verse to learn, in order to help bring the weekly theme and scripture to life.

Idea: To help introduce each new scripture, divide a sheet of paper into 9 (or 12) pieces. Then write the scripture out on the pieces so each piece contains a word or two (or three) of the memory verse. Cut out the pieces and lay them face up in order. Read the verse a couple times together. Then take turns removing one card and saying the verse again. Repeat until the verse can be said with few or no cards.

The **daily devotional reflections**, meant to be read throughout the week, have been written by various storytellers, leaders, and pastors.

The **daily readings** of Scripture are based on the Revised Common Lectionary.

“...eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus
Christ to be revealed.”
—1 Corinthians 1:7

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

He Is
Coming

WEEKLY PRAYER

*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 earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.*

*Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.*

—Charles Wesley

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.
What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

—Mark 13:36–37

DAY 1

Come to the Table

Sunday Scripture Reading:
Mark 13:24–37

Additional Scripture Readings:
**Isaiah 64:1–9; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19;
1 Corinthians 1:3–9**

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!””

COME, LORD JESUS

The science fair was one of the most anticipated days of the school year.

We had months to prepare. Parents were invited. Students from other grades were invited. There would be *judges*. The science fair was the culmination of months of hard work and planning. Our teacher had talked about the upcoming fair almost every single week for half the year. We were given guidelines, suggestions, instructions, due dates—everything we needed to prepare adequately.

On the day of the fair, I showed up with something I'd haphazardly thrown together the previous night, and I wasn't fooling anyone who stopped to look at my presentation.

I had plants. No speech. No demonstration. No documented results from a months-long experiment observing and recording their reaction to different kinds of music or the different ways they grow. Not even a poster! Just plants.

The reason my presentation at the science fair was underwhelming had nothing to do with my lack of knowledge surrounding the assignment, expectations, and deadlines. I had all the information, the resources, and the support I needed. I simply chose not to prepare.

In Mark 13, Jesus is trying to warn the disciples, both about what lies ahead and how they can best prepare for it. There will come a day when the Son of Man will return, and it will be incredible. The kicker? No one knows *when*.

Because we “do not know when that time will come” (Mark 13:33), Jesus encourages his listeners (and us today) to always be ready. We don't prepare for the Lord's return by trying to whip something together at the last minute the night before. Instead, we strive each and every single day, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength while at the same time striving to love our neighbors as ourselves. Is it always easy? Of course not. Will we fail along the way? Most definitely. But when we take seriously the call and commands of Jesus upon our lives, we posture ourselves in such a way where we can confidently say at any day or hour, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

—Jason McPherson

DAY 1

What is something for which you have spent time preparing?

What was the benefit of all that hard work and preparation?

In this Advent season, how can we anticipate the coming of Jesus?

How can we *actively* wait?

8 What does it look like to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength during this season of waiting?

FAMILY TIME

Visit adventexperience.com to download and print the first week's family devotional activity sheet. Pass it out to each participating child and help guide them in their response. Once each child has written or decided on their response, hang them in a prominent place in your home as a reminder for the remainder of the Advent season.

If you don't have access to a printer or simply want to design your own, use the question below to get started.

I will prepare for Advent by:

DAY 2

Today's Scripture Reading:
Micah 4:1–5

Additional Scripture Readings:
Psalm 79 and Revelation 15:1–8

¹ In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will
be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and peoples will stream to it.

² Many nations will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of
the LORD,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths.”
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

³ He will judge between many peoples
and will settle disputes for strong nations far
and wide.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against
nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

⁴ Everyone will sit under their own vine
and under their own fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

⁵ All the nations may walk
in the name of their gods,
but we will walk in the name of the LORD
our God for ever and ever.

—**Micah 4:1–5**

IN THE LAST DAYS

Even in my earliest memories of her, my grandmother was vocal about her wait for the return of Jesus. She had already lived through the Great Depression, World War II, and Vietnam. She raised eight children and experienced the kind of subsistence living common among poor farmers' wives in the middle of the twentieth century. By the time I got to know her in the 1980s, she was in her late sixties. Her husband, my grandfather, had passed away, her life had become very simple, and she had settled into a pattern of waiting that would characterize her life for the next thirty years. She was a little tired, a little worn, and ready for Jesus to come back for her.

I remember running into her house in between games of tag with my cousins, and there she always sat, rocking ever so slightly in her chair, binding the edges of a quilt. She had grown up Amish and, even after leaving that community, still wore a covering for the rest of her life. When she came to the edge of her thread, she gathered a new length, pressing it between her lips. She slipped it through the needle's eye, and then she began to sew again, the needle flashing and clacking against the thimble on her finger. She often sang quietly,

*What a day that will be,
when my Jesus I shall see,
and I look upon his face,
the One who saved me by his grace.
When he takes me by the hand,
and leads me through the Promised Land,
what a day, glorious day that will be.*

She never stopped talking about the last days. Whether it was at the dinner table over roast and potatoes, or out on her porch on a hot summer day shucking corn, her mind constantly came back around to that central hope, that pivotal moment she awaited. She often commented on the strangeness of the times, and when she did, I knew she hoped that her wait was almost over.

DAY 2

On one particular July 4, my cousins and I climbed up on the roof of her house to watch the fireworks. I lay there, the gritty shingles rough under my bare back, scared to death I'd slip off the roof and fall to my death, surrounded by marigolds and petunias. I stared straight up at the fireworks, their explosions reverberating against my tiny ribcage. But always, between the launch and the firework, there was that anticipatory moment of silent waiting. And I thought about my grandmother and wondered what the last days would be like. It frightened me to think about everything I knew and loved coming to an end. I felt very small in those moments, and life seemed tenuous.

As I get older, though, my attitude toward the last days has changed quite a bit. I'm beginning to understand the earnest waiting and expectant attitude my grandmother exhibited. As I witness the drawn-out deaths of people I love, the steady erosions accomplished by age and disappointment, or the horrors that plague our world, I cannot help but feel this strong desire take root inside of me—a desire to see the last days as Micah described them the third and fourth verses of the fourth chapter:

“They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.
⁴ Everyone will sit under their own vine
and under their own fig tree,
and no one will make them afraid,
for the LORD Almighty has spoken.”

Can we even begin to imagine this kind of universe, where worldly power is upended, where war is extinct, where nations no longer prepare for battle but instead seek the mountain of the Lord? Can we even begin to imagine a world where no one is afraid?

These, I think, were the last days my grandmother awaited. She saw a granddaughter die and the resulting pain experienced by her children. She knew the heartache of rebellious offspring. She knew just how lonely a cold winter night could be.

Only a few years ago, my grandmother sat in her armchair, surrounded by her eight children and each of their spouses, her thirty grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren as well. She lay quietly, her mouth slightly open, barely able to talk. But every so often, she whisper that she wanted us all to sing, and sing we did, some of us with tears running down our cheeks.

*What a day that will be,
when my Jesus I shall see,
and I look upon his face,
the One who saved me by his grace.
When he takes me by the hand,
and leads me through the Promised Land,
what a day, glorious day that will be.*

I think she was surprised to be dying before witnessing those final days here on earth. I think she always expected to see Jesus's return during her mortal life, to see some miraculous parting of the clouds, to finally hear the trumpet she had heard so much about.

But what we saw happen during that week was no less miraculous. Any swords she carried were beaten into plowshares. Any spears that had been wielded against her in this life were bent into fruitful pruning hooks. In the end, she sat under her own tree of descendants, and she was no longer afraid. In the end, she went up to the mountain of the Lord, the highest of mountains, the one exalted above all other hills.

Strangely enough, when she died, I was not left with an overwhelming sense of loss. Instead, her passing reminded me of the final victory over all things that is yet to come. Now, every Advent season, I think of my grandmother, of her ability to wait patiently for so many years, and I try to do the same.

Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.

—Shawn Smucker

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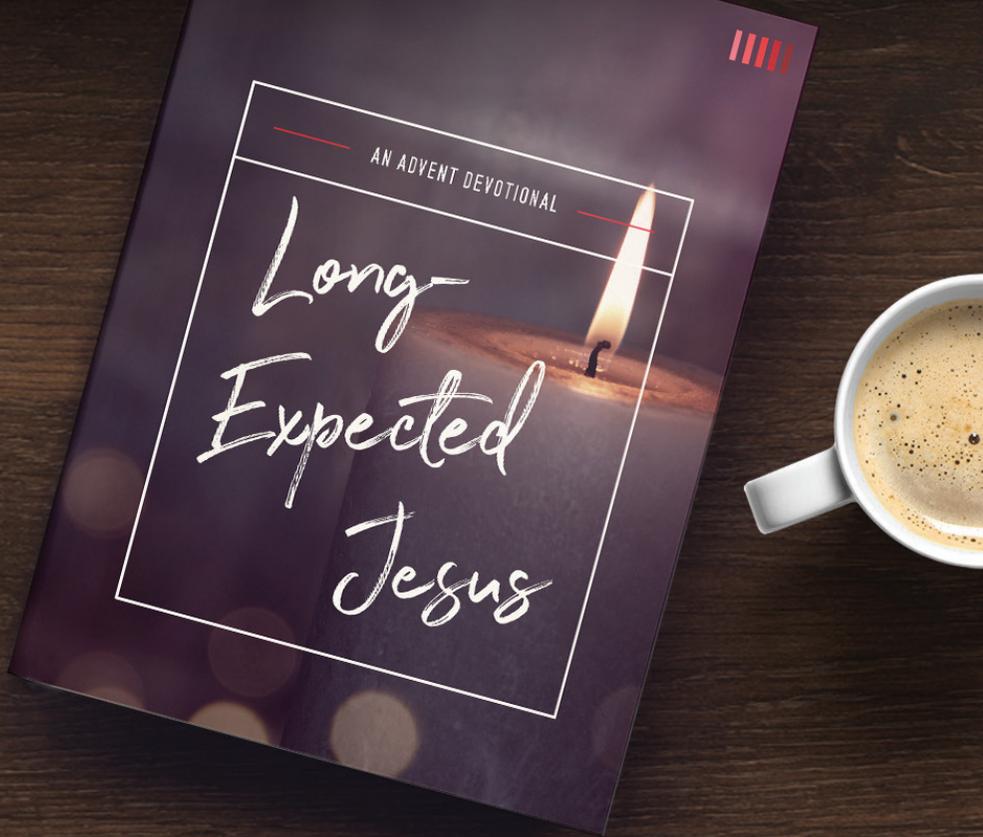


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the return of our *Long-Expected Jesus*.



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