



ADVENT WEEK 1 | HOPE

November 26, 2023

[Worship Music Playlist](#)

SONG 1 | Come Thou Long Expected Jesus (Red Mountain Version)

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 146 (MSG)

Hallelujah! O my soul, praise God! All my life long I'll praise God, singing songs to my God as long as I live. Don't put your life in the hands of experts who know nothing of life, of salvation life. Mere humans don't have what it takes; when they die, their projects die with them. Instead, get help from the God of Jacob, put your hope in God and know real blessing! God made sky and soil, sea and all the fish in it. He always does what he says—he defends the wronged, he feeds the hungry. God frees prisoners—he gives sight to the blind, he lifts up the fallen. God loves good people, protects strangers, takes the side of orphans and widows, but makes short work of the wicked. God's in charge—always. Zion's God is God for good! Hallelujah!

WELCOME | Announcements (Christmas Party & Dinner Plans) & Intro-ing Advent

Welcome to the official start of Advent. A season in which we journey through the past with visions of the future even as we anticipate God's acting in the present. A season in which every scripture and song, collect and carol, decoration, and declaration helps us pay attention in our active anticipation to the many arrivals for which we hope.

For our word, "Advent" means just that, "arrival." "Advent" emerged from the Latin word *veni*, which means "coming, the coming of Christ [Jesus] in every way." Jesus arrived in history in great humility in a Bethlehem home. Jesus will arrive in the clouds, in splendid glory, to the "fulfillment and finality of all things." "But surely," contends poet and author Malcolm Guite, "between this beginning and this end, there are many other advents. Jesus with us always from His last day on earth to the end of the ages. Jesus "In our encounters with the poor and stranger, in the mystery of [communion], in those unexpected moments of [Life Light all around us]," and "surely there is also an advent and Christ come to us,"¹ Christ in us, and our lives in, through, for His, as we've pondered and prayed these last months.

It's this journey of paying attention to anticipation and arrival that we begin together today, with a story!

¹ Malcolm Guite, *Waiting On The Word*, ix.

ADVENT STORY | “The Little Match Girl” (see additional printout for slides)

[INVITE KIDS TO THE STAGE STEPS & READ]

ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING | HOPE

I know that may seem a strange, dark story to read as a beginning to “the Cycle of Light,” a season of uncovering the origins of our faith. Hans Christian Andersen’s story feels more like an end. Though, it is an end that takes place and casts a vision for a new beginning.

Truth be told, all stories that are ends to beginnings and beginning to some different end, are a bit strange, a bit *apocalyptic*. And yet, as Karen Swallow points out,

“The biblical meaning of the Greek word translated into English as ‘apocalypse’ is simply an *uncovering or revelation*. We often associate apocalypse with the end of the world [for various reasons, but most commonly in our faith] because of the vision given in the book of Revelation [that we suppose is primarily] about future days. We also make this association because some moments of revelation in human, church, or personal history do seem like the end of the world. There are times [like] this particular historical moment—which has included crisis in the church, the first global pandemic in a century...a deep political polarization [, not to mention the turmoil in the Middle East (as Dr. J’s billboard attests)]—seems to [herald] the end of the world [is here]. But perhaps it’s only as the rock group R.E.M. put it, ‘the end of the world as we know it.’ And maybe that’s fine.

[In this season, in our history, in the church calendar, and as our life together this year has entailed,] Many truths that have been hidden are being brought to light. Many deeds that have been covered up are being uncovered. Many assumptions that have been unexamined are being brought to the surface and scrutinized in order that we may consider whether they are rooted in eternal truths or merely in human traditions. In the process, Jesus is revealing more of himself. As he said to his Father [and we read last week] in Matthew 11:25[-30],

‘You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the little children, [yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me...For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.‘]

It is significant that the word translated ‘revealed’ in [these] verses is the Greek word for ‘apocalypse.’ [Uncovering, revealing, an end to what we know, a beginning of a different,

deeper end to which we live.] Some of what is hidden from us is spiritual reality, divine truths that can be revealed to us only through God's divine power."²

Power that became a person, flesh and blood, birthed into the neighborhood, taking up and on the work of making a life. A person whose images, visions, and enlightenments of life now pointed us to life forever, whose way of life now embodies forever living, whose life given became and remains the hope of the end of what we know (an existence with as much separation, suffering, and sin (off the mark), as something different), a hope that is the arrival of what will be is far greater than what we can ask (put on our wish lists) or imagine (in our grandest tales):

God can do anything, you know - far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Glory to God in the church! Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus! Glory down all the generations! Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes! (Ephesians 3:20-21)

[WHILE LIGHTING THE CANDLE, SAY:]

Because He has arrived, we hope.

Hymn/Carol | Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

SCRIPTURE READING | Matthew 11:1-10 (MSG)

When Jesus finished placing this charge before his twelve disciples, he went on to teach and preach in their villages. John the baptizer, meanwhile, had been locked up in prison. When he got wind of what Jesus was doing, he sent his own disciples to ask, "Are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?" Jesus told them, "Go back and tell John what's going on: The blind see, The lame walk, Lepers are cleansed, The deaf hear, The dead are raised, The wretched of the earth learn that God is on their side. "Is this what you were expecting? Then count yourselves most blessed!" When John's disciples left to report, Jesus started talking to the crowd about John. "What did you expect when you went out to see him in the wild? A weekend camper? Hardly. What then? A sheik in silk pajamas? Not in the wilderness, not by a long shot. What then? A prophet? That's right, a prophet! Probably the best prophet you'll ever hear. He is the prophet that Malachi announced when he wrote, 'I'm sending my prophet ahead of you, to make the road smooth for you.'

² Karen Swallow Prior, *The Evangelical Imagination*, 3-4.

SONG #3 | All Who Hear by Young Oceans

COLLECT & COMMUNION

COLLECT | *Second Sunday of Advent*

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Through the body, blood, and life everlasting of Jesus, amen.

SONG #4 | Light of the World by Lauren Daigle

BENEDICTION | Romans 15:4-9, 12-13 (MSG)

Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it's written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterize us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next. May our dependably steady and warmly personal God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all. Then we'll be a choir—not our voices only, but our very lives singing in harmony in a stunning anthem to the God and Father of our Master Jesus! So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it! Jesus, staying true to God's purposes, reached out in a special way to the Jewish insiders so that the old ancestral promises would come true for them. As a result, the non-Jewish outsiders have been able to experience mercy and to show appreciation to God. Just think of all the Scriptures that will come true in what we do! For instance: Then we'll join outsiders in a hymn-sing; in Isaiah's word: There's the root of our ancestor Jesse, breaking through the earth and growing tree tall, Tall enough for everyone everywhere to see and take hope! Oh! May the God of great hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!

Dismiss for Dinner |

Dinner Announcements | (Sunday AM & 2024 Budget)