



# ADVENT

*The Coming of Jesus Christ*



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# ADVENT

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Whether we realize it or not, we all order our lives around rhythms and calendars - we wake up, we have a routine of getting ready for our day, we take the same path to work or school- all of these patterns serve to structure our lives in a way that helps us grow. The spiritual life, too, has rhythms and patterns that help us grow - traditions, liturgy, and calendars.

Advent has been a part of the church's regular rhythm for centuries as a way to anticipate the arrival of Christmas and all it means. Again, whether you realize it or not, you almost certainly participate in Advent in your own way. Did you put up a Christmas tree? That's Advent. Do you change the music you listen to? That's advent. Do you prepare a special meal for Christmas eve or watch reruns of *It's a Wonderful Life*? All of this is our way of ordering our calendar to connect us to meaning and purpose. As it turns out, our world is pretty enthusiastic about advent, but not necessarily in the way that it was meant to be celebrated. While music and lights and Christmas trees aren't bad things, the Advent season was meant to focus our hearts and minds on Jesus. Advent is meant to be a way to anticipate the celebration of Christ's arrival by intentionally setting aside time to reflect on who Jesus is, the circumstances around his birth, and the consequences of the incarnation.

Advent season typically begins the Sunday after Thanksgiving, that is, typically four Sundays before Christmas, ultimately culminating on Christmas Day. There are lots of ways to celebrate, and many of us come from traditions and denominations that put their unique spin on things. Again, the point isn't the traditions themselves, but what those traditions point our attention, and our hearts, toward.

Here at WoodsEdge, we celebrate the Advent season by decorating our church campus, emphasizing opportunities to bring hope to families and communities in need, and starting each Sunday morning service with the lighting of a candle. Each week a new candle is lit until the final candle, called the "Christ Candle" is lit on Christmas Eve. During the Christmas Eve service, the flame from the Christ Candle serves as the source for all the candles that are held by the congregation as we remember that Christ's first advent was the beginning of the gospel spreading to the ends of the earth - the Light of the Word illuminating the darkness.



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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This guide contains four weeks of content designed to help direct your mind, heart, and even your ears and taste buds to celebrate the arrival of King Jesus. Each week includes scripture to read from the gospel account of Jesus' birth to be reflected upon both individually and as a group. You may choose to go through the Advent guide as a family, parents leading their children in a time of worship, or as a community group during your regular gatherings. The goal isn't to complete a study or to answer every question, but to intentionally set aside time to reflect and worship during this special season.

This year's guide begins in the book of Matthew, specifically with the genealogy of Christ beginning with Abraham. While this may not be the easiest portion of scripture to read, we encourage you to prayerfully consider who each person is within the story of Christ, and feel the sense of anticipation that the early readers of Matthew's gospel must have felt. The rest of the guide follows along with Matthew's account until the final week where we take a detour over to the Gospel of John to meditate on the incarnation - the revolutionary idea that God became man and made his dwelling among us.

Even if you are familiar with this story, from years and years of reading and celebrating, we want to encourage you to slow down and really consider the depth of love and meaning that God is communicating to you and your community through His word. If this is your first time reading through the Advent story, we're excited for you to experience it with us.

If you have kids, we've included a guide to lead them through a time of worship during the Advent season. It's easy for our kids to get swept away with the materialism and self-centeredness that our world emphasizes during the holidays; this is our way of shepherding our children's hearts to remember and honor Jesus as king. So, before you break out the elf-on-a-shelf or schedule time to get pictures with Santa, make a plan to sit with your kids and make much of Jesus this Advent season.

Each week, we've also included a few ways some members of our staff at WoodsEdge celebrate Advent: a recipe for a Christmas favorite, some books we love, or a tradition that's been dear to our own families.

Finally, our staff team has put together an Advent Spotify Playlist! Some of the music will be very familiar, some of it might be an exciting new find. Whatever the case, we want to share the gift of worship and music with you this season. You can find the playlist by scanning this qr code.



We hope this guide can be a gift from our WoodsEdge staff team to you and your family. We're so excited to anticipate and celebrate the arrival of Jesus with you.

Much love,  
WoodsEdge Community Church Staff



# WEEK 1

*A Promise Kept*  
*Matthew 1:1-17*



## WEEK 1

### A PROMISE KEPT | MATTHEW 1:1-17

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#### **BOTTOM LINE**

God keeps his promises.

#### **PRAYER**

*Lord, I acknowledge that you keep your promises. You are faithful. Even when I stress out and doubt, I can always remember that you keep your promises. Forgive me, Lord, for constantly trying to make things work on my own, as if I had control over my own life and circumstances. Forgive me Lord for constantly looking to things of this world to satisfy my need for peace, rest, and confidence. Your promises are good and true in your son, Jesus. He is all that I need. He is my hope and my future, and I pray that that truth would be brighter and brighter in my heart and mind each day. Amen.*

#### **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

*Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.*

*And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.*

*And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the*



*father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.*

*So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.*

*Matthew 1:1-17*

### **SYNOPSIS**

We all need confidence. We all need trust. Life is built on trust. Without it, you live life constantly on edge. It's exhausting and unsustainable. So often that trust is broken by the people around us. But we were made for trust. We were made to have peace in knowing that true things are true and that when we're told we're loved and wanted, that's not going to change. But how do we know it's true?

This week, we'll be looking at the genealogy of Jesus Christ to get the bigger picture of God's faithfulness to humanity through the course of history. As much as we are tempted to skip over sections like this in our Bibles, the truth is that every genealogy is meant to be a record of God's faithfulness and trustworthiness.

It may just seem like a list of hard-to-pronounce names at first, but remember that each name, from verse 1 to 17 is a mile marker, a flag in the ground, a reminder that yes, God is indeed faithful to his word. From His promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth through his family, to his promise to David to establish a forever-king from his line, to the promise repeated over and over in the days of the prophets to restore sinful humanity to God, Matthew is inviting us to marvel at how beautifully God wrote the story of his love for us. What would that do for you to know that God's promises are true, and that Jesus is the answer to every desperate need of the human condition? At last, the true wonder of Christmas is how Jesus, this tiny baby born in obscurity, could be the fulfillment of the promise made by God to humanity, and to each of us - to make us his children and restore us to himself forever.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Adoration: How does this passage, and more specifically this list of names, demonstrate God's goodness and faithfulness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Confession: Reflect on times in your life when you've found yourself trusting more in your own power or strength than God's faithfulness. Write out a prayer of confession and repentance.

3. Thanksgiving: Reflect on the last year of your life. List out all the ways that you have seen God's faithfulness and take some time praying thanks.

4. Supplication: Are there any needs in your life that you need God to demonstrate his faithfulness in? Are there any needs in the lives of those around you? Write some down and take time to pray for those needs.



## WEEK 1

### COMMUNITY / FAMILY DEVOTION

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What is something you trust on a regular basis, and has there ever been a time it has broken your trust? *Specify that the question is “WHAT” and not “WHO,” unless you’re ready for people to talk about trust issues they have with their parents...*

#### READING

Read Matthew 1:1-17

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Look over Matthew 1:1-17. What names in the genealogy do you recognize? How have you seen God be faithful in the story of each of those names?
2. What does it look like for us as individuals and as a church to really trust that God is faithful to keep his promises?
3. What are some ways we misunderstand God’s promises to us? Specifically God’s promises to love us (Rom. 8:31-39), call us his kids (John 1:12), to provide for us (Luke 12:6)?
4. How do you want your life to look differently in light of the truth that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises? What change in activity or thinking do you need to make?

#### KIDS

**Read:** Matthew 1:1-17 together.

**Ask:** What’s something you had to wait for? How did you feel when you finally got it?

**Teach:** The whole world was waiting for God to send a rescuer to save everyone from their sin. Remember that sin keeps us away from God, and since God loves us, he wanted to take that sin away. Christmas is all about that rescuer finally arriving!

**Do:** Listen to the song “Matthew’s Begats” by Andrew Peterson together.

**Do:** Make snowflakes together as a family and decorate a room in your house with them! Texas may not be known for snow, but you can still make it a white Christmas for your kids.

#### FINAL TEACHING POINT

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of all God’s promises to us, and the more we can abide in that reality, the more we can celebrate God’s incredible love for us and face life with confidence.



## BREAKING BREAD

*Our family made it a priority to pass on missional living to our children as a way to remind them the real meaning of Christmas. We would often participate in a Giving Tree project and take the kids to buy a gift for the family in need. Some seasons, we would go out to eat, and pick a family at the restaurant and privately pay for their meal and ask the staff to tell the family...*

*Jesus loves you.*

Jeff Miller, Generations Pastor

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*After the Christmas Eve service, my family makes hot chocolate and peanut butter cookies for “Santa” and “Mrs. Claus”. Our 22, 18, 17, and 14-year-old children still enjoy doing this as a family.*

Marie and David Perez, Pastor of Women’s Discipleship

### **HOT CHOCOLATE INGREDIENTS**

6 cups whole milk

1½ cups heavy cream

1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 oz.)

1 tbs unsweetened cocoa powder

1 package chocolate chips (12. oz) preferably Nestlé

1 teaspoon natural vanilla

Marshmallows for topping

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- Add milk, heavy cream, condensed milk, and cocoa powder to a medium saucepan.
- Heat over medium heat, whisking occasionally, until the mixture just begins to bubble but does not boil. (Be sure that it doesn’t scorch or burn.)
- Add chocolate and vanilla and whisk until the chocolate is melted and the mixture is smooth.
- Pour into mugs and serve with whipped cream and or marshmallows.

## **GLUTEN-FREE PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES (24 COOKIES)**

### **INGREDIENTS**

1 cup unsalted butter (softened)  
1 cup brown sugar  
1 cup sugar (plus 2 tablespoons for top of cookies)  
1 cup peanut butter (creamy or crunchy) (we like Jif, creamy)  
2 large eggs  
2 teaspoons vanilla  
2 ½ cups all purpose, gluten free flour  
½ teaspoon baking soda  
¾ teaspoon baking powder  
¼ teaspoon salt (optional if using salted butter)  
1 cup roasted salted peanuts (ground or finely chopped to resemble breadcrumbs)

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- In a large mixing bowl, cream together butter, brown sugar, and sugar for 4 minutes, until light and fluffy, scraping the sides of the bowl often.
- Add eggs and vanilla and beat for 1 minute longer. Fold in peanut butter.
- Stir in flour, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Fold in finely ground or chopped roasted salted peanuts.
- Chill dough for at least 1 hour or overnight is ideal. After chilling, preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Roll dough into 2-inch balls. Place remaining sugar into a small bowl. Roll cookie dough balls into sugar to coat. Place on cookie sheet and press each ball twice with a dinner form to form a crisscross design.
- Bake for 10-13 minutes or until the edges become a light golden color. Do not over-bake as these are supposed to be soft and chewy. Let the cookies rest for at least 5 minutes before moving to a cooling rack.



# WEEK 2

*Endure*  
*Matthew 1:18-25*



## WEEK 2

### ENDURE | MATTHEW 1:18-25

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#### BOTTOM LINE

Christ endures our shame and calls us to endure for the sake of others.

#### PRAYER

*Lord, I remember today how Jesus endured my shame. Christmas, I confess, is meaningless without the cross that he endured for my sake. I'm humbled, Lord, by the selflessness of Christ in the way, for the sake of the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame. I'm reminded of your servant Joseph who willingly and obediently endured the shame and pain of his circumstances for the sake of Mary, his wife, and for the sake of your plan to rescue humanity through Mary's child. Thank you, Lord, for such an incredible example of faithfulness. I pray that as I shepherd this community, you would give me such a heart to endure for the sake of the joy set before me: to see your children live and thrive, to be close to your heart, to be a part of your global plan of redemption for all who would believe. Amen.*

#### PERSONAL REFLECTION

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

*'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel'*

*(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

*Matthew 1:18-25*

## SYNOPSIS

Hurt and alone. That's where so many people are on Christmas. It's a dark place to be, so much more so when you're told everywhere that Christmas is supposed to be the "happiest time of year." For many of us who do have places to go, it's easy to slip into the "family" mindset that forgets just how lost and alone people feel this time of year. Unfortunately, while most of us would be willing to chip in for an Angel Tree gift or maybe even pack a box for Operation Christmas Child, the idea of taking on the burden of inviting someone into *our* experience of Christmas is a burden that's just too heavy. I mean, our in-laws are hard enough to please... right?

This week, we'll be looking at the person of Joseph, a man who is called "just" by God's word. Joseph's life, in an instant, became a giant it-wasn't-supposed-to-be-like-this: He was supposed to get married to a good girl, they were supposed to have a home, start a life, celebrate the birth of their child, raise a family. It was supposed to be... good. But everything went wrong, and he found himself looking into the face of a girl who was about to be very, very alone. Incredibly, faced with a seemingly impossible situation, Joseph kept himself open to God's will - when he was asked to bear the shame of an illegitimate son and a seemingly unfaithful wife, he obeyed for the sake of the joy set before him - this son he would adopt would be called Jesus (which means God saves) so that through him, humanity would find their rescue from the power and penalty of sin.

This is at last the final foreshadowing of the coming Christ. After all the pictures of 'men (and women) after God's heart' in the Old Testament, finally this Joseph (who is himself called "the son of David") would be a picture of how Jesus, his adopted son, would, for the sake of the joy set before him would endure the cross, despising its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God (Hebrews 12:2). Incredible, isn't it? So now, in light of the enduring that Jesus suffered for our sake, we can look to Joseph's example of obedience and ask ourselves for whose sake can we endure shame so that they would experience the joy of Jesus? Christmas is far more than lights and presents, far more than just a moment of obligatory charity; it's a moment for us to step into the chaos of our world and say, as Joseph endured, as Christ endured, so I will endure... for you.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Adoration: Consider God's kindness - When Joseph was confused and hurting, God provided him with perspective and insight. Take some time to write out ways that God has demonstrated his kindness to you.
2. Confession: Reflect on times in your life when you've let fear distract you from God's goodness and faithfulness. Write out a prayer of confession.
3. Thanksgiving: When has there been a time God has given you perspective or insight into a difficult situation? Write it out and pray a prayer of thanks.



4. Supplication: Is there anywhere you need wisdom, insight and understanding? Scripture tells us in James 1:5 that if any lack wisdom, he should ask for it. Take some time to write out places you need wisdom and pray for wisdom.



## WEEK 2

### COMMUNITY / FAMILY DEVOTION

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When was a time someone carried you? *Here the word “carried” means: endured something for your sake, or perhaps even invited you when you found yourself alone and vulnerable?*

#### READING

Read Matthew 1:18-25

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 1:18-25 together - imagine yourself in Joseph's shoes. What do you think he was feeling in each scene of this story (finding out your fiancée is pregnant, deciding to divorce her quietly to spare her public shame, hearing from the angel, getting married under very shameful circumstances)
2. What does Joseph's character reveal to you about what God deems to be a man who is “just”?
3. Read Hebrews 12:1-2 together - when was a time you were willing to endure suffering for the sake of a reward?
4. What keeps us from taking on the shame and suffering of others?
5. Jesus (and Joseph) endured shame and suffering for the sake of another because they believed there was joy that was coming. We know that there is joy coming for us when we get to see the life-changing reality of Jesus transform lives and rescue from sin and death. What does it look like to endure for the sake of someone this Christmas. Is there someone you need to welcome or invite into your community this Christmas?

## **KIDS**

**Read:** Matthew 1:18-25 together.

**Ask:** When was a time you had to trust someone?

**Teach:** *Can you imagine how Mary and Joseph felt when they heard that they were going to be parents to the God of the Universe? Mary was so excited she wrote a song about it, but Joseph was scared and nervous. God wanted to take care of Joseph so he sent a messenger to tell him not to be scared - Joseph could trust God with everything! There are definitely times when I get scared, but I know that I can trust God. Christmas isn't just about parties and presents, it's about people learning to trust God and knowing that God will keep his promises.*

**Do:** At bedtime, retell the story of each of your children's birth or arrival in the family. Take some time together as a family to pray for other families you know that are expecting soon or who are longing to have kids. Pray especially for courage for those in challenging circumstances.

## **FINAL TEACHING POINT**

As a community and as individuals, the Lord is calling us to walk in Christ-likeness, enduring shame and suffering for the sake of those who are lost and vulnerable. Joseph was a picture of the kind of obedient endurance his adopted son would take upon himself. Now we who have been set free and welcomed into the family of God, who can we carry this Christmas?



## BREAKING BREAD

*One of our main traditions around Christmas is to get peppermint milkshakes from Chick-fil-A and go look at Christmas lights at least twice a week during advent. There's a neighborhood in Tomball called Prestonwood that goes absolutely crazy with lights, and that's our favorite. If you decide to check it out, just be prepared to drive slow and be amazed.*

Tim and Katie Johnson, Pastor of Men's Discipleship

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*One of the treasured sentiments at Christmas is giving and receiving - sharing! Our family spent nearly 20 years in Venezuela as church-planting missionaries. As we embraced the Venezuelan culture and people shared their lives and customs with us, one of the things we enjoyed tremendously was the food. And at Christmas time there were special dishes that we have adopted and still enjoy today. There's one recipe that's pretty easy to make, it's called Pan de Jamon (Ham Bread). Mark and I will take a day every year during the holidays to make some to share with others and eat ourselves. It reminds us of our many cherished friendships and memories from our time there. It's a joy to share the recipe with you. Feliz Navidad!*

Gina and Mark Rollins, Connections Ministry Associate

### **VENEZUELAN CHRISTMAS BREAD (HAM BREAD) INGREDIENTS**

For this dish the easiest thing to do is to buy frozen loaves of white bread. For each loaf of bread you need the following: (adjust to your personal tastes)

12 Spanish olives, sliced  
5-6 slices of ham  
¼-1/3 cups of raisins

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- Let the dough thaw and rise. (Mark and I usually put each loaf into a greased pan and cover it with plastic wrap to thaw and rise overnight.)
- Roll the loaf into a rectangle about the size of a cookie sheet. Lay the slices of ham to cover the dough except for the edges. Sprinkle the olives and raisins on top of the ham. (We usually make three rows to make sure they're distributed evenly when sliced.) Roll it up like a jelly roll, pinching it closed to seal.)
- Place the roll seam-side down on a greased cookie sheet and tuck the ends under. Brush with a beaten egg
- Bake in a 350 degree oven for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and cool on a baking rack. Wrap them up whole to give as a gift or slice to serve and enjoy!



# WEEK 3

*Friends & Enemies*  
*Matthew 2:1-12*



## WEEK 3

### FRIENDS & ENEMIES | MATTHEW 2:1-12

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#### **BOTTOM LINE**

The King has arrived; what is your response?

#### **PRAYER**

*Lord, I acknowledge that you sent your son Jesus not just in meekness, but also as a king to establish a kingdom. I confess that many times my heart resists this because I want to keep control over my life. I want to be king of my own heart. Lord please take that part of me away so that, like the magi, I can rejoice at the rightful king's arrival. I pray that I wouldn't be like the scribes who were so unaffected by the news of Jesus' arrival. I don't want my heart to become so hard that Christmas just becomes another holiday. Change my heart, Lord, to be a worshiper this Christmas. Amen.*

#### **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

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

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.' After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

*And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

*Matthew 2:1-12*

### **SYNOPSIS**

How do we respond to the news that Jesus has come? As much as Christmas music would make us think that the whole world is rejoicing at the news of Jesus' arrival, the truth is that the world, like Herod and the scribes, is mostly divided between those who are either ambivalent (like the scribes) or hostile (like Herod) to Jesus' appearing. But why?

The truth is that Jesus wasn't just a sweet baby born in a barn. He arrived as the rightful king of the universe. Herod and the scribes, just like most of us, immediately recoil at the idea that someone else would have the right to rule our lives. Even if we don't say it out loud, we feel quite comfortable calling the shots, deciding for ourselves what works or doesn't work. That pet sin we're hiding from everyone? Jesus doesn't need to know about that. Start giving away the money I earned at my job? I don't think so. Forgive him for what he did to me? No way.

Christmas represents far more than the truth that God is loving. He is love. He speaks. He engages. He made his dwelling among us. All of that is true. But his arrival was the landing of a covert operation to dethrone the imposter kings of this world. The question is, how does your heart respond to this news? Does it thrill your heart? Or does it make you... uncomfortable?

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Adoration: Consider the kind of God that would cause such a stir - God is perfect in power! Take some time to write a prayer adoring God for his power.
2. Confession: Reflect on a time where you worked hard to protect your own interests or your own power. Pray a prayer of confession to God.
3. Thanksgiving: When was a time this year when you delighted in Jesus? Was it a song that moved you? Was it a mission trip where you got to see God's heart for the lost? Write it out.
4. Supplication: What are needs in others' lives you can lift up, specifically things that you feel powerless to control? Write them out and take some time to pray for them.



## WEEK 3

### COMMUNITY / FAMILY DEVOTION

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What is something that makes you uncomfortable? *The goal here isn't to dive into uncomfortable conversation... just to point out things that make us uncomfortable. Keep it light!*

#### READING

Read Matthew 2:1-12

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read Matthew 2:1-12 together - what are some ways the three primary characters in this story (Magi, Scribes, Herod) are contrasted against each other?
2. Herod manipulated the news of Jesus' arrival to try and strengthen his own position. How have you seen our culture do this? How do people do this in general?
3. The Magi saw the star and they "rejoiced with exceeding joy". When they saw the child, they worshiped him by bowing down and presenting him with gifts. What are ways we can show our joy and worship to Jesus today?

#### KIDS

**Read:** Matthew 2:1-12 together.

**Ask:** When was a time you were so happy to meet someone?

**Teach:** The Bible tells us that the magi, these wise men who were waiting for God's son to arrive, were so, so excited to meet Jesus! They traveled for months and months, in fact. The gifts they brought weren't just nice things - the gold was a gift fit for a king, the frankincense was a gift that said Jesus was God, and myrrh was a gift that you would use for a funeral (remember that Jesus came to die for our sins). Not everyone was excited though - Herod and the scribes weren't excited. The whole world has a choice to either be excited about Jesus coming or to shrug their shoulders and live selfishly. Christmas is all about that choice- as a family we're going to choose to make Christmas all about Jesus together.

**Do:** Pick a clear night during the week to go outside and look at the stars. Download a star map app and see if you can pick out some constellations. Talk about what it must have been like for the magi to travel by starlight in search for Jesus.

**Do:** Bake and deliver cookies to your neighbors. As you prepare, talk about what it must have been like for the magi to prepare their gifts for Jesus, and the joy of giving those gifts to Jesus and his family.



### **FINAL TEACHING POINT**

As much as our culture loves Christmas, the reality is most people are, like Herod and the scribes, at best ambivalent about Christ's arrival. In fact many people are openly hostile towards the idea of Jesus being the true King (and all the implications that go with that). What is your response?



## BREAKING BREAD

*On Dec. 1, all the kids drew names amongst themselves for their “secret pal.” They were supposed to secretly do nice things for that person all month. Then on Christmas Eve we would go around the dinner table and let each kid guess who they thought their secret pal was—the person who had been extra nice to them. I emphasized to them that it was a good thing to be guessed—that meant you had been noticeably nice! They also purchased a little gift for their secret pal to give them on Christmas Eve (we would set a particular dollar amount as a limit). Our 4 kids were only 5 years apart so we had quite a few years of doing this. It was a way for me to guide them to think about someone besides themselves at Christmastime. Every Christmas Eve, the kids would sleep in their sleeping bags underneath the Christmas tree. This is also when we would read the Christmas story from the Bible.*

John and Angela Herrington, Executive Pastor

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*When Brandee and I were in college, I remember visiting her and her family during the Christmas break. I was surprised to learn that their family had the tradition of eating tamales for their Christmas eve dinner - something they picked up when Brandee was growing up in El Paso. Once we got married, we carried on that tradition into our family. Even more so, we typically host a tamale making party earlier in the month, sharing time and food with friends. Usually we make enough for everyone to take a dozen home. This recipe is a modified version of the Alton Brown tamale recipe.*

Phill Kwon and Brandee Kwon, Communities Pastor

### **TAMALES**

#### **INGREDIENTS**

#### **FOR THE FILLING**

- 1/4 cup chili powder
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 2 1/2 teaspoons cayenne pepper
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- 2 pounds boneless pork butt, untrimmed
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and minced

### **FOR THE WRAPPERS**

4 to 5 dozen dried corn husks

### **FOR THE DOUGH**

2 pounds (about 6 cups) yellow cornmeal

1 1/2 tablespoons kosher salt

1 tablespoon baking powder

7 1/2 ounces lard

3 to 4 cups reserved meat cooking liquid

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- **Make the meat filling:** Combine the chili powder, kosher salt, paprika, smoked paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, cayenne pepper, black pepper and cumin in a small bowl. Divide the mixture in half and reserve one half for later use.
- Cut the pork butt into 6 equal pieces and place in a 6- to 8-quart saucepan. Add half of the spice mixture and enough water, to completely cover the meat. Set over high heat, cover, and bring to a boil. Once boiling, reduce the heat to low and simmer until the meat is very tender and falling apart, 2 to 2 1/2 hours. Remove the meat from the cooking liquid and set aside, then remove the cooking liquid from the pot and reserve.
- Let the meat and liquid cool slightly. Remove any large pieces of fat and shred the meat into small pieces, pulling it apart with your hands or two forks.
- Place a saucepan over medium heat and add the vegetable oil. Once shimmering, add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until semi-translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic, jalapeño, and remaining spice mixture and cook for another minute. Add the meat and cook until it is heated through, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat.
- **Prepare the wrappers:** While the meat is cooking, put the husks in a large bowl or container and submerge completely in hot water. Soak the husks until they are soft and pliable, at least 45 minutes or up to 2 hours.
- **Make the dough:** Combine the cornmeal, salt, and baking powder in a large mixing bowl. Add the lard and, using your hands, knead together until the lard is well incorporated into the dry mixture. Gradually add enough of the reserved cooking liquid to create a dough that is the consistency of thick mashed potatoes. The dough should be moist but not wet. Cover the bowl with a damp towel and set aside until ready to use.
- **Assemble the tamales:** Remove a corn husk from the water and pat dry to remove excess water. Working in batches of 6, lay the husks on a towel and spread about 2 tablespoons of the dough in an even layer across the wide end of the husk to within 1/2 inch of the edges. Spoon about 2 teaspoons of the meat mixture in a line down the center of the dough. Roll the husk so the dough surrounds the meat, then fold the bottom under to finish creating the tamale. Tie the tamales around the center, individually or in groups of 3, with kitchen twine.
- **Cook the tamales:** Stand the tamales upright on their folded ends, tightly packed together, in the same saucepan used to cook the meat. Add the reserved meat cooking liquid and additional water so the liquid comes to 1 inch below the tops of the tamales. Try not to pour the broth directly into the tops of the tamales. Cover, place over high heat and bring to a boil, about 12 minutes. Remove the lid, reduce the heat to low to maintain a low simmer, and cook until the dough is firm and pulls away easily from the husk, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.



# WEEK 4

*Dwelling*  
*John 1:1-17*



## WEEK 4

### DWELLING | JOHN 1:1-17

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#### **BOTTOM LINE**

The God of the Universe has made his dwelling among us.

#### **PRAYER**

*Lord, today we acknowledge that Jesus your son is much more than simply a man who taught us to be good- he is the Word made flesh. We reflect on the mystery of the incarnation, that the creator and sustainer of all the universe could be a helpless baby held in the arms of a young mother. Power and weakness, glory and meekness. As we anticipate the arrival of Christmas, would you remind us of the wonder of who Jesus is, and when we find ourselves dizzy from the thought, would you overwhelm us with the truth that this God-Man knows us, loves us, and gave himself up to rescue us from our sins? We are so grateful for Christ's first advent; we now pray with anticipation for his return. Amen.*

#### **PERSONAL REFLECTION**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

*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 bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.')* For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

*John 1:1-17*

### **SYNOPSIS**

This last week before Christmas, we leave the gospel of Matthew and hear from the Apostle John. John's gospel is less about telling the story of Jesus and more about understanding the reality of who Jesus is, and so John's gospel starts not with a play-by-play like Matthew or Luke do, but the lofty, poetic words of a philosopher. Which, of course, is so ironic, because John was no philosopher. He was a fisherman.

John's gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning" which is meant to transport us all the way back to Genesis 1. Actually the very first words of the Bible itself. Yes. We're talking about something that goes all the way back to the beginning of the beginning. With those three words, John connects this Jesus, baby born in a manger, to the creation of the universe. Jesus is no mere man. He is God.

But John doesn't stop there. He goes on by saying "In the beginning... was the Word." What does that mean? The "Word" or "Logos" in the original Greek language, was a big, big deal - it represented to the Greeks the idea of wholeness, completeness, the explanation of all things. The Logos was the highest idea in all of philosophy and the source of all wisdom. In essence, if "in the beginning..." was a nod to God for an Old Testament reading Jewish audience, "...was the Word" would have gotten cheers from the Greek speaking Gentile audience. With that simple phrase, John brings all peoples together under the banner of this God who became flesh.

John continues by explaining that this creator God-of-the-universe became flesh, made his dwelling (literally, pitched his tent) among us, and while all of creation celebrated and worshiped his arrival, his own people didn't recognize him. He was born a baby to a poor blue-collar family, far from home, in essentially someone's garage. As inconspicuous as this moment was to the world, we know that it would be the most important, most magnificent, most mysterious, most wonderful moment in the history of the universe. Our God is Immanuel - he is with us. Our Jesus, the one who saves, our rescuer. He is with us.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Adoration: Meditate on the mystery and the wonder of the incarnation. How can the God of all the universe become a person? Imagine sitting and eating with Jesus. Imagine walking with Jesus and asking him questions. Imagine Jesus smiling as he tells you a story and laughing with you. This person you are imagining is the God of the Universe! Take some time to think about that and enjoy adoring Jesus for his incarnation.

2. Confession: Reflect on times where you pushed Jesus into the background; when Jesus was born, John tells us that his own people did not receive him. They were oblivious. Take some time to write out a pray of confession and repentance.

3. Thanksgiving: Consider your salvation story, or a story of God meeting you in a time of tremendous need. Write out that testimony and take some time to enjoy that feeling of gratitude.

4. Supplication: Scripture tells us that Jesus is well acquainted with our sorrows (Is 53:3). Who are some people who are grieving and suffering sorrows right now? Take some time to list them out and pray for them.



## WEEK 4

### COMMUNITY / FAMILY DEVOTION

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Who are some people you are so glad to be near and why? *This is a great opportunity to encourage one another! If you are leading your kids, ask them what they like about each other and why they like being near one another.*

#### READING

Read John 1:1-17

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read John 1:1-17 together. What are some things about this passage that stand out, especially in the way it describes Jesus?
2. Consider the Advent candles as you think about John's words. What does it mean for Jesus to be the "Light of the World"? What ways have you seen Jesus be a light in your own life?
3. John says that Jesus "came to his own, but his own people did not receive him." How have you seen this to be true in our own world and society?
4. What does it mean to you that Jesus "made his dwelling among us"? Why is it important that Jesus would want to be near us?

#### KIDS

Read: John 1:1-17 together.

**Ask:** What do you think it would be like for Jesus to be our neighbor?

**Teach:** John writes about how God didn't want to be far away - instead, Jesus came to be our neighbor. Not just a neighbor, he became like us - a human being! That's pretty amazing to think that the God of the Universe would love us so much that he would become a person and live with us. Christmas is all about God's love for us - that even when people said no to God, he said yes to us. Jesus might have come as a baby, but we know that he didn't stay a baby. He grew up, lived a perfect life, and then died on the cross in our place to take all the dark sin away so we can be with God again. He died, and then came back to life! Even though we think about Jesus as a baby, we can be excited because we know what Jesus would eventually do for us.

**Do:** Pitch a tent outside in your backyard, or even in your living room and imagine what it was like for Mary and Joseph to be outside waiting for the baby to arrive. Talk about John 1, and how God loved us so much that he decided he wanted to be our neighbor and 'pitched his tent' to be near us. If you can, build a fire and make some s'mores together. Mary and Joseph probably didn't have s'mores, but you can still enjoy dessert together!



### **FINAL TEACHING POINT**

Christmas is all about nearness. God's nearness to his people, and through that, the nearness we get to share with one another. Let's consider how great God's love for us is that when we were far from him, he drew near to us, made his dwelling among us, and rescued us.



## BREAKING BREAD

*On Christmas Eve we place what we called Adornments on our Christmas tree. There is a scripture that goes with each one, for example, one ornament is a lion and we read scripture about Jesus being the Lion, one is a lamb, a crown etc. We would read with our children and they would put the ornaments in the tree. Great way to be sure we are focusing on Jesus and not presents.*

Guy and Kelli Caskey, Pastor of Movements, Pastor of Missional Life and Operations

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*Every Christmas morning, after letting the kids look in their stockings, and an initial round of presents, we pause the festivities to gather around the kitchen table and share breakfast together. We always have a breakfast casserole, monkey bread, and coffee, carrying on a tradition from Cayli's childhood. Having specific, special foods that we associate with certain holidays are part of the anticipation of the season, reflecting the greater anticipation that we celebrate of the advent of Christ. We want to create these experiences for our children, so that they, too, will one day understand on a deeper level the greater joy that all of the festivities are pointing to. We pause in the midst of gifts and wrapping paper, and spend time sharing a meal, talking with one another, giving thanks for the gift of good food, family, and most of all, Jesus.*

Stephen Pankratz, Associate Pastor of Community

## **MONKEY BREAD**

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 1 bag frozen yeast roll dough balls
- 1 stick butter
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 1 tsp cinnamon

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- Grease a bundt pan with nonstick spray and cover the bottom of the pan with frozen dough balls.
- Melt butter in the microwave.
- Stir brown sugar, pecans, and cinnamon into the melted butter.
- Cover dough balls with sugar mixture.
- Cover with wax paper and place a bundt pan on a cookie sheet. Allow to rise overnight (if cooking in the morning).
- Bake at 350 for about 30 minutes (check it at 20 minutes), until brown on top.

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*This is a Christmas staple at our house. Due to the simple nature of the recipe, it frees me up to spend more time with the people I love! Enjoy!*

Carol Ham, Pastor of Prayer and Care

## **RIB-EYE ROAST**

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 8-9lb Rib-eye Roast
- Cracked black pepper
- Salt
- Flour

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- Bring rib-eye roast up to room temperature on the counter
- Preheat the oven to 500 degrees
- Rub roast all over with flour, salt, and pepper and place in a shallow pan
- When the oven is hot, place the roast in the oven and close the door
- Cook for roughly 2 hours - the roast should be cooked for about 5 minutes a pound and then the heat should be turned off
- From the time you start the roast until it is ready to slice should be 2 hours
- Pour part of the fat out of the pan, and add some water and salt for a delicious gravy. The roast will be pink in the middle; you may want to cook your roast for 6 more minutes if you do not like it so pink.



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