

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Hallelujah Chorus by George Frideric Handel

(Here is a song to help your group as you worship. Simply play the video and encourage people to use it to enter into a spirit of worship.)

Hallelujah Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUZEtVbJT5c>

Icebreaker(s)

Advent is a season of waiting. What story can you remember about waiting for Christmas as a child?

- Or -

What's a favorite tradition or action you practice in the run-up to Christmas each year?

Text for Discussion: Isaiah 9:1-7

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

The four Sundays leading up to Christmas are known of as Advent. "Advent" literally means *appearing*. It is a season of remembering and relishing the arrival of Christ in His birth and the hope of His return. It is set aside to reflect on every good thing God has promised to do for us through Jesus and to worship Him accordingly. Advent is a unique juxtaposition of longing and loss, of brokenness and beauty. It helps us to understand the world into which Jesus came, offering context to the promises of the Bible.

Our theme for this Advent Season will be Immanuel: God with Us, and our focus for this week is hope. God invites us to consider where life has not worked out. The longings that God has written into our hearts as His image bearers are incredibly good, but sadly, we tend to waste them, even sabotaging them as we settle for things that cannot possibly fulfill our longings. But God also shows us there is a foundation upon which we – both individually and collectively as the people of God – can find hope and become great neighbors to our community and artists to His glory.

This week's passage is set during a time when the Kingdom of God was separated into northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms and the Assyrian Empire threatened to conquer the known world. The prophet Isaiah was called to minister to Judah while it was ruled by the evil king Ahaz. Isaiah gives us hope, as it shows how God pursues and cares for us even in the midst of our sin. God speaks to Ahaz through the prophet but declares to His people throughout history that God is faithful and committed to fulfilling His promises. And God will accomplish this through a child, Immanuel. God enters our broken world and broken hearts through the weakness of a baby. Paradox of paradoxes, wonder of wonders: God will stabilize the world through a stable in Bethlehem. All brokenness and all sin will be redeemed through Jesus.

Advent stirs up our longing both to understand what happened in Bethlehem and for the completion of God's promises when Jesus returns. All of God's promises finds their "Yes!" in Jesus; in Him, God is with us and for us. The names given to Jesus in Isaiah 9 speak to these promises. "Wonderful Counselor" tells us He possesses supernatural wisdom, full of grace and truth (*John 1:14, 1 Cor 1:30*). "Mighty God" declares Jesus is the God of the Old Testament, with power great enough to eradicate evil. Because Jesus is our "Everlasting Father", He alone can unite us to the Father through His work. "Prince of Peace" promises that Jesus will bring

shalom to all effects of sin and death. Through this we begin to realize more fully that “God with us” is truly *God for us*. Because of Jesus, the permanent favor of God rests on us. (Luke 2:14).

The hope we find in Jesus is everlasting. The peace He brings will have no end, and our comfort is that God has come near to us in Jesus, and it is His joy to fulfill His promises.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How can you participate with God in His work of “making all things right” through Jesus?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- 1) Scotty Smith noted that the context for the Isaiah passage was a time of great need for the nation of Israel. What evidence do you see of great need in our context today?
 - Vs. 2 of the passage notes that the people “walking in darkness” have seen a great light. Do you think that people today believe they are in a time of darkness/need? Why or why not?
 - How have you experienced hope in your times of need?
- 2) Four titles for the Messiah are listed in this passage, and each one shows up in the life of Jesus. Read each passage below and answer the question that follows.
 - Wonderful counselor (refers to Jesus as healer) - Matt. 8:1-13
 - i. How does Jesus’ healing in this story relate to our own need for healing?
 - Mighty God - Mark 9:2-4
 - i. How does Jesus’ show of power here relate to our need for His power in everyday life?
 - Everlasting Father – John 1:1-5
 - i. How can Jesus’ eternal nature encourage us regarding his care for us and the world around us?
 - Prince of Peace – Luke 7:36-50
 - i. How did Jesus’ presence bring peace to the woman and the others in this story?

Application/Prayer Ideas

- 1) Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Which of these attributes of Jesus do you most need right now, and why?
- 2) Which do you think our world needs most now, and why?
- 3) Watch this video together in preparation for a closing time of prayer: (Derek Webb – “This Too Shall Be Made Right” -- Made Right” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xx48l38cZ1A>)
- 4) Close in a time of prayer for one another and for the world around us, praying for the needs identified in application question #1 above, and also asking God to show us how we can make a difference in question #2 during the Advent season.
- 5) Ideas for group Spiritual Experiments:
 - a. Have everyone in the group agree to ask a non-Christian to lunch or coffee this week, and ask their friend: “What do you think needs to be made right in the world? How do you wish the church would help?” Bring back what you hear in the conversation to share with the group next week.
 - b. Have everyone in the group sign up for the advent readings on the PCC app. Agree together to use this each day this week to slow down and reflect on the season. Open next week’s group time by asking everyone how God spoke to them through the experience.