

LifeGroup

resource guide

for the week of November 27

Here we go! Advent 2016 is here. Advent, Latin for “coming” is the season in which we count back 4 Sundays before Christmas day so we can look forward to the One we count on who was born on Christmas day! It’s a season in which we listen to the voices of anticipation from the Old Testament so that we might embrace the promises of the New Testament. Let’s begin this Advent remembering the words of Isaiah:

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;*

*And the government will rest on His shoulders;*

*And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,*

*Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

There are 256 names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ. I imagine this is because He is infinitely beyond all that any one name can express.

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus His name shall be called Wonderful… Wonderful describes

❧someone who is transcendently beyond the common…

❧someone who exceeds the ordinary…

❧someone who serendipitously stirs the soul with astonishment…

❧someone who ineffably woos the heart, engages the mind, & ennobles the spirit…

*Is Jesus Wonderful?* Consider His birth— no other has ever occurred like it. He could have come amidst pomp and ceremony or He could have been born in a palace and rocked in a golden cradle while attended by angels. But even this would have been a great condescension for Him. Instead Jesus comes incognito yet not anonymously. The swaddling clothes wrap the Baby whose flesh wraps the glory which is His incarnation. His name shall be called Wonderful…

*Is Jesus Wonderful?* Consider His character—no other has ever approached His perfection. He is sinless but never self-righteous. Rich and poor, male and female, Jew and Gentile, legalist and hedonist, prostitute and Pharisee are equally welcomed by Him. His love is relentless, His favor is unbiased, and His example is unmatched. After living closely with Jesus for three years His closest friends esteem Him so highly that they worship Him as Messiah, Lord, and Savior. His name shall be called Wonderful…

*Is Jesus Wonderful?* Consider His life— no other has ever lived as Jesus lived. He came to bless and not to curse; to lift up and not to cast down; to save and not to destroy; to free and not to oppress. There has never been the slightest hint of selfishness or self- interest found in the testimonies of His life. He never used His authority or His power for personal gain. He had the power to turn stones into bread and yet went without food for forty days. He fed crowds, wept for cities, healed the sick, ignored barriers of gender and race, blessed His enemies, forgave His killers, and purposely gave His life as a ransom for sin. His name shall be called Wonderful…

*Is Jesus Wonderful?* Consider His teaching— no other has taught what Jesus taught. His teaching is simple and clear but never patronizing or condescending. He is original and never pedantic. His parables reflect His creativity and His exhortations manifest His authority. He came without credentials and made claims that are humanly unbelievable. He wrote no sermons, dictated no letters, published no books, founded no school, and committed his message to uneducated fishermen. Yet His teaching has endured for 2000 years and has lifted nations and peoples out of darkness and degradation. His name shall be called Wonderful…

*Is Jesus Wonderful?* Consider this… When Jesus was born Rome ruled the world. Her invincible power and ubiquitous influence secured her an empire without rival in world history. 33 years later, in one of her least esteemed provinces, a man was crucified for sedition according to Roman law. His execution would have gone unnoticed by 99.99% of the empire. This man never launched an army nor did He ever carry a sword. On no occasion did He ever incite violence or organize a revolution. He exhorted His followers to pay their taxes, healed a centurion’s servant, and taught His followers to bless their persecutors. Humanly speaking His teaching should have been completely forgotten within a generation. Neither Rome or Israel embraced it as mainstream or practical.

Within 300 years of His death the teaching of Jesus dominated Rome. By then His life and teachings had been carried further than the empire had ever reached. Today Rome is a capital but not an empire. Her power is gone, her temples lie in ruins, and her gods forgotten. Today more people call on the name of Jesus than any other name. He has overcome every barrier known to humanity— gender, class, nation, culture, race, and tongue. Oriental and occidental are within His grasp. 2000 years later the world, on the brink of a new millennium, continues to be shaken by the compelling and relevant testimony of Jesus. You have only to lift up your head and look about you to see the wonder of His presence impacting our world today. His name shall be called Wonderful…

*Is Jesus Wonderful?* O yes, He is wonderful and so much more…

He is Counselor…

He is Mighty…

He is God…

He is Everlasting…

He is Father…

He is Prince of Peace…

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end…

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This Christmas I hope you recognize that His presence and His impact will be no different and no less in your life than He has been for countless millions around the world throughout history and today.

Enjoy your LifeGroup!

Getting to know one another better…

What are some of your first memories of the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Matthew 1.18-2.23

*Matt. 1.18   Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.*

*Matt. 2.1   Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:*

*6 ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,*

*ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;*

*FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER*

*WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”*

*Matt. 2.7   Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.” 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.*

*Matt. 2.13   Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.”*

*Matt. 2.14   So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”*

*Matt. 2.16   Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:*

*18 “A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,*

*WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,*

*RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;*

*AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,*

*BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE.”*

Matt. 2.19   But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 “Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.” 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Reflecting on Advent…

When you read Matthew’s Christmas narratives what are your first impressions?

How does God speak in these verses? How does God speak to you?

Herod is a man of faith. He takes the Bible seriously! How could Herod “believe” the Bible and yet find himself opposed to God’s rule?

Advent Season points forward… As you anticipate this season ahead are you hopeful, anxious, confident, apprehensive? Why?

If you could only pray for one thing this Advent season, what would it be? How can your LifeGroup partner with you for this prayer?

Praying for my group…