

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 9:2-7

The thing I hate most about winter is actually not the cold. It's the darkness. I hate the idea of the darkness creeping in so early – the week of November 29 this year it basically sets at 4:23 in the afternoon. Not cool!

It doesn't help that we have seen such upheaval this past year. It is easy for all of us, pretty much no matter where we stand, to let the politics and the cultural tension, not to mention the ongoing pandemic and its effects on virtually every area of life, get us down. We can feel like we are walking around in the dark with no hope of light.

The prophet Isaiah lived, preached and wrote in Judah at a time that was arguably much darker than ours. The Kingdom was split. The people of God had largely abandoned their role and duties. Assyria threatened Israel and tensions between Israel and Judah were at an all-time high – kinsman were at odds and Israel allied itself with Syria. King Ahaz of Judah foolishly asked for help from the Assyrian Empire. They gave it – then took over Judah too.

Isaiah 8 gives a warning from God that all of this is about to happen. It's a call to trust the Lord in dark times. Isaiah 9 gives hope. The Messiah will one day be revealed.

If you are like me and Advent is a bit unfamiliar (I have vague recollections of calendars and sometimes lighting candles in church as a kid, but that's about it), the Advent season is the start of the Church year and is marked by the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. In 2020 that means Advent starts on November 29.

Advent focuses on preparing for the coming of Jesus both as a child that first Christmas, and his return as the coming King. The four weeks of Advent are often tied to specific themes such as hope, joy, love, faithfulness, and peace. Advent should be a time of great anticipation, of hope, joy, and love no matter the world's circumstances—or yours for that matter. This year may be harder than ever for you, perhaps you are facing loneliness and loss, perhaps the weight of the world seems to press in from all sides. As we prepare for his coming together, let's begin by looking at Isaiah's prophecy of a Messiah in chapter 9.¹

Open it

1. What is your favorite Christmas Carol? What makes it special to you?

¹ Adapted from Kevin O'Brien, *Devotions for Advent 2020: A Light in the Darkness* (Treading the Dawn, 2020). Introduction and Christmas Day.

Read it

Isaiah 9:2-7 (NLT version below)

² *The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.*

*For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine.*

³ *You will enlarge the nation of Israel,
and its people will rejoice.*

*They will rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest
and like warriors dividing the plunder.*

⁴ *For you will break the yoke of their slavery
and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.
You will break the oppressor's rod,
just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.*

⁵ *The boots of the warrior
and the uniforms bloodstained by war
will all be burned.
They will be fuel for the fire.*

⁶ *For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *His government and its peace
will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!*

Explore it

It is the beginning of Advent, but we are all looking forward to Christmas Day. The morning will break, and Jesus Christ is born. We, born in darkness, we who have dwelt in the dark for so long are waiting for this great light. When I read Isaiah 9, I cannot do so without hearing the music of Handel: the violins and the chorus. There is something about it that reaches down into my very soul, wells up within and compels me with the hope and love of God.

Christmas is Advent realized, longing and hope and love fulfilled. On this day God has birthed the redemption of the world. On Christmas day life and light break through death and darkness, showing us the reality of a God who cannot be contained or sidelined, who will never stop pursuing His creation so that they may be with Him.

Wonderful Counselor

Mighty God

Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace

What words. What promise. For a little while we wait for His coming. For a little while we may suffer and toil. But look at what He has done. Look at what He is yet doing. Look at what He will *always* do. This is our God. He is not small or pitiless. He is not slow as we are too often guilty of believing. He is patient, giving time for us to hear and respond to the good news of this child, this child who redeems the world.

His reign will not end. His peace transcends what we can think or imagine. It is a peace that seeps down into our very being, a peace that can pervade even in the most difficult of circumstances because it is not a peace of this world alone. It is God's peace and that cannot be overcome.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, as Advent begins, we do well to remember that Advent is the beginning. It signals the birth of Christ's reign within us and in the world. It is ours to get to know Him more, to see His life and work, to hear the words of His teaching, to let them so permeate our lives that we become like Him. The birth of a baby, any baby, is a glorious gift of God. The birth of His Son is so much more glorious because this child grew to save us all. This child offers us the hand of God. It is up to us to reach back, to accept the offer. It is up to us to seek out the teachings of the man this child would become. In Him is light and life. In His life and words, in His death and resurrection we can experience Advent every day.²

2. What is the state of the people in the beginning of the passage?

3. What is the promise of verses 3-4?

4. How is the promise fulfilled? (v. 6)

5. How is the Kingdom of the Messiah described? (v. 7)

² Adapted from Kevin O'Brien, *Devotions for Advent 2020: A Light in the Darkness* (Treading the Dawn, 2020). Introduction and Christmas Day.

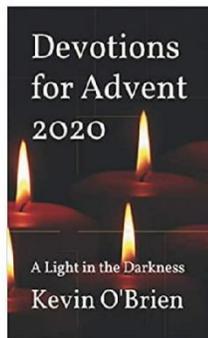
10. How does imagery in verses 5 and 6 – warriors on the one hand and a child on the other – speak to the spiritual battles that we fight? How does this affect the way you look at difficult circumstances?
11. What do the names given to the Messiah – to Jesus – say about him? Which one speaks most directly to you? Why?
12. Christ's Kingdom is described in verse 7 as one of eternal peace, justice, and righteousness. Now more than ever we need all three, but our current cultural climate seems to want to select one or perhaps two at most. How can we as Christians ensure that all three are operative in our lives?
13. This Advent season, how will you keep the coming of Jesus at the forefront of your day-to-day life? How will you prepare yourself for His dawning light? How will you exhibit the Hope, Joy, and Love He offers?

Advent

RESOURCES



The world could use some light right now. Advent begins Sunday, November 29 and is a time of preparation for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. This year, choose to focus your thoughts and attention on Him during this often distracting time.



Devotions for Advent 2020: A Light in the Darkness

Kevin O'Brien

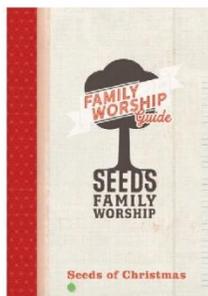
Spend fifteen minutes a day this Advent season and you will be challenged, inspired and renewed by the love of God for his people. Whether Advent is a bit like a foreign language to you or is a part of your normal life, this short devotional will help to guide you as you seek the one of whom the angels sang "joy to the world, the Lord is come!" Each of the four weeks of Advent focuses on a specific theme: hope, preparation, joy and love. Each day offers a Scripture passage and a short meditation to focus your heart and mind on the coming King.



The King Has Come: Advent Readings From Isaiah

Cisco Cotto

The book of Isaiah was written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. But it contains many predictions about His birth, life, and death. In this 28-day Advent devotional, we go on a journey through Isaiah to see the prophecies about the King "who is and who was and who is to come."



Christmas Family Worship Guide & Videos!

Seeds Family Worship

Here is a free devotional tool that will help lead your family into the Word and into awesome family time celebrating the birth of Jesus. This family worship guide was written to go along with the Seeds of Christmas videos that you can watch for free on Seeds YouTube Page. We believe that using Seeds music and videos along with the Christmas guide will facilitate fun, meaningful family time and help you grow in your relationships with Jesus.

More info at villagebible.church/advent