

Chase R. Kuhn



*Waiting
for the
Christ*

*Advent readings to focus your
heart and mind on Jesus*



The heart of Christmas is easily swamped by sentimentality, busyness and shopping. Setting aside time each day during December for special reflection and focus on the great gift of Jesus has become a time-honoured practice—one that helps us escape from these distractions.

This devotional book is a timely and thought-provoking advent resource from respected pastor and scholar Dr Chase Kuhn.

Chase doesn't just help us to remember and celebrate Jesus' first advent; he also casts our hearts and minds forward as we anticipate and long for Christ's return, a second advent!

Through daily Scripture reflections (of around ten minutes each), *Waiting for the Christ* will take you through the past, present and future of Jesus' salvation work and the joy we can find in all his triumphs.

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For my family, near and far.
May you treasure Christ even more
during Advent and always.
May you watchfully wait for his coming.

Now may the God of peace himself
sanctify you completely, and may your
whole spirit and soul and body be kept
blameless at the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful;
he will surely do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

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PREFACE

Why mark the season of Advent?

We mark important things on our calendars so that we don't miss them. This is a way of committing to an event—of being deliberate. In theory, when we do this, we are saying, “This is too important to let other things get in the way”. Marking the Advent season—formally the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, or informally 1–25 December—is a great way for Christians to be deliberate in their celebration of Christmas.

But what exactly is Advent? The word ‘advent’ means the arrival of a notable person or thing. For Christians, Advent is the time we celebrate the arrival of the King, Jesus the Christ, God’s Son incarnate. But this is not simply a look back in history to the first coming of Christ. Christians today live expectant of Christ’s *second* coming. Both events are interconnected in their importance and achievement. The first signalled the inauguration of the kingdom; the second will bring the consummation of the kingdom.

My wife and I have had to work hard to think about

Christmas as we've moved around the world. Early in our lives, the *feeling* of Christmas began when decorations were hung, when music came on, when the air got crisp, and when the advertisements on TV told us what shopping season it was. But this all became confused with our move to the Southern Hemisphere. Suddenly it was strange to sing 'Frosty the Snowman' or 'Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire' because it was the middle of summer. Likewise, Santa in a vintage snow-suit was suddenly surfing Santa. With the change in all the familiar cultural cues we were used to receiving, how could we really appreciate Christmas when it didn't *feel* like Christmas any more?

This change in feeling signalled to us that much of what we associated with Christmas time had little to do with Christmas at all. In fact, so much of it drove us to think about spending money. What did we need so that we could decorate and get that Christmas feeling right? What did we need to buy to cover our list of gifts for others? What did we want on *our* Christmas lists?

Moving internationally, we thought we might be freed from these sorts of distractions, but this was not the case. Just because we are in a different place doesn't mean we don't suffer the same distractions. In fact, as much as we look back on American consumerism colouring our Christmas experience, now we find the busyness of Australian social habits squeezes out meaningful reflection on the season.

The point is that if we want to be intentional about appreciating the gift of God's Son, especially at Christmas, then we should *mark the season*.

This book is, in the first instance, an effort for *me* to be deliberate in marking the season. It is a project several years in the making, with the compulsion growing each year to appreciate Jesus at Christmas time. But it is also an attempt for me

to help many others who don't want the season to be swallowed up by distractions. My aim is to guide readers through a brief (10-minute) daily reflection on a text that draws us into the wonder of the advent of Christ—both the first advent, Christmas, but also the coming *second* advent. My hope is that readers will mark the season, recognizing not only that Advent is a wonderful time in the year but, even more, that we are to live ever expectant of Christ's return.



INTRODUCTION

Why the Son of God became a man (and stayed one!)

*I*dentify is not just a big issue of *our* day. Who we are as people has been a focus of study for millennia. In the last few centuries, Western culture has been preoccupied with individuality. But however hard one may try, no individual can be separated from the family and people they've come from.

We see this most clearly in our relationship with our parents. For better or for worse, we are like our parents. We can wish and work to be *different*, but it is inevitable that there will be evidence of our relationship to them. It may be as noticeable as a loud, outrageous laugh or as subtle as an attached earlobe.

The Bible makes it clear that our origin is very important. It is for this reason that Christians so often talk about the creation story. All of us came from Adam—even Eve. This is why all of us, having a common heritage, share a common

problem. When Adam sinned, it affected the entire human race. Our likeness is to Adam, our first father.

But although we cannot refuse our parents' genes, we can experience a real change of identity. At Christmas, we celebrate the fact that the Son of God was born as a human. In fact, he came to be the "*last Adam*" (1 Cor 15:45). There is an offer, in Jesus, for us to be freed from the curse we've all been trapped under in Adam. In Jesus—the last Adam—we can find new life—a new identity.

Looking for deliverance, the people of God longed for the coming Messiah. But in many ways, their expectations of this saviour were too small. The people had hoped for a king to free them from worldly oppression such as foreign invasion or political tyranny. But Jesus came to conquer far greater enemies. He came to put an end to sin, death, and the power of the devil.

This deliverance required more than just a *life lived* (though it certainly required that!). It also required a *death died*. And the *life* needed to be lived perfectly so that the *death* could be satisfactory. Furthermore, because his life was perfect, the saviour could overcome death and the grave. If we have any doubt about who was born from the virgin womb at Christmas, we look to the empty tomb. This was none other than the Son of God.

During Advent, we celebrate what Christians have confessed in the Nicene Creed for centuries: "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human". The Son of God was born a real human. But this is not all. Article 4 of the 39 Articles reminds us that after Jesus lived and died, he rose and "took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things" that are truly human.

God's Son is still a human with a real body and human nature. He has retained this humanity so that we might obtain the eternal life he has promised us. Now Jesus reigns

in heaven. But he will return to earth to complete the work he began when he first came, the work of the redemption of the world.

And so we wait. Looking back, we are comforted that Christ did truly come, just as was promised. He delivered us from our greatest foes. Looking forward, we continue to hope in the promise of perfection when Christ comes again. Until then, we wait—not stagnantly or powerlessly, but in the power of the Holy Spirit who is working out the new life of Christ in us even now. This new life in Jesus is our new identity. No longer slaves to sin and cursed in Adam, we live our lives after the *last* Adam.

This is the gift on offer at Christmas: new life. The gift is given to us in the abundance of God's grace, which freely offers us righteousness. But like all gifts, this one must be received. It would be a shame to receive a Christmas gift but never unwrap it and truly experience what the package contains. So too, it would be a waste to simply admire Jesus as a figure of history or part of a cute Christmas story, never appreciating him for who he is, God's true Son, given for us. To receive this gift, we must believe in him and trust that in him we now find our life:

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that your Son willingly took on flesh for us. Thank you that he is still—and will forever be—incarnate, so that we might have life forever with you. May we honour him in our lives lived in faith. Amen.



PART 1

Preparing the way
for the Christ

DAY 1

Immanuel

“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people. And I will dwell in your midst, and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.” (Zech 2:10–11)

The anticipation of the Lord’s coming is a two-edged sword, cutting both ways: it cheers the faithful and frightens the sceptical and disobedient. So the Advent season—when we wait for the coming of the Lord—is a decisive time to take sides and express allegiances. The Lord will come to dwell with his people. The question is “How do we respond to this message?”

The tale of Robin Hood is familiar to many. While King Richard is away at battle, other powers and rulers take charge, employing corrupt, unfaithful methods. Some people side with these powers, seizing the day and living as if the king will never return. But there are those few outliers, the remnant, who wait in hope and long for the return of the rightful king.

So it is with God's people in the world. We wait in hope; but what do we do while we wait for the King?

In Zechariah's time, the people had returned to the land of Israel after a season of exile. But as they returned and tried to set up their lives back at home, they did not make worshipping God a priority.

So the prophet called on them to repent (Zech 1:3–6). The logic of the message went (and continues to go) a bit like this: “I called your parents to repent, and they didn't. Then what happened? My word against them came true. My word is sure. Now you have a chance to heed my word. Like all my other words, it is sure. What will you do? Your parents had to learn the hard way. You have a chance to learn from their mistakes.”

We often find it difficult to read ancient words in the Bible and see any immediate connection to our lives. We think that being there then would have been easier because we would have seen things firsthand. But even then, the call was to *faith*. Today, we have the advantage of looking back on these stories from God's people and learning the lessons they had to live through. Better still, we've seen the fulfilment of God's promises made through the prophets. God *has* come. When the Gospel of Matthew explains Jesus' birth, it says:

All this took place to fulfil 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). (Matt 1:22–23, citing Isa 7:14)

The prophecy of Immanuel—which means ‘God with us’—is nothing short of monumental. When Zechariah told God's people that the Lord would come, the call to repentance in preparation came with an incentive: the Lord *himself* would

dwell among his people. But what would this mean?

Having God among us sounds great, but it is difficult to imagine. Again, we must look to Jesus if we want to know what it is like to have God among us. He has come as God's King to establish God's kingdom. This kingdom is not like other kingdoms in the world, so we would be wrong to imagine God among us in worldly ways. For example, 'God with us' doesn't necessarily mean riches or prosperity. Instead, and even better, God *himself* satisfies us "as with fat and rich food" (Ps 63:5). So when we make God's coming about meagre worldly matters—victories and pleasures—we don't imagine enough. God is our satisfaction. His coming brings abundant joy beyond all worldly comparison. In fact, God's presence will mean such great things that nations from all over the world will come to be included among his people.

But our problem is that we often weigh up the promises of God and wonder whether they will come true: "Will he really come? Will he? Really?" The challenge to questions like these is shown in history with the answer "He most certainly did". Nothing can stop the word of the Lord. It is sure. The wrath he promises against those who neglect and deny him will be unstoppable. But even better, the good promises of God are also unstoppable. If the Lord has promised to turn from his wrath and bless us with his mercy, comfort, blessing, and joy, then we should expect this to happen.

Zechariah gave an important double-edged word to the people of Israel: be sure that what the Lord promises will come to pass. God is coming to dwell among his people.

Are we ready to receive the righteous King? Are we expectantly awaiting his return?

Still today, this word cuts both ways. For the doubters, the faithless, and the unrepentant, the Lord's presence will be a terrifying thing. God will dwell with us, and when he does,

justice will abound, bringing all to perfect submission to his King. But for the faithful, the Lord's coming to dwell with us will cause great rejoicing, as the King brings righteousness and ends all suffering, death, and pain (Rev 21:3-4). What is certain, whichever way it cuts, is that the word of the Lord will come to pass. He is coming to dwell among his people. Are we prepared?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, prepare my heart for the coming of Jesus. May my desire be for him and all the benefits of having 'God with us'. In Jesus' name, amen.