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The Promised One: Advent Readings from Christianity Today
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Christianity Today, 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188
ChristianityToday.com

Printed in the U.S.A.

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The Greatest Hope of All

GLENN PACKIAM

Imagine a boy being bullied on the playground. Kids surround him, taunt him, push him onto the ground. He's fighting back the tears, but that's about all he can fight; there's no way to stop the terror and the torment.

Then, almost out of nowhere, a car pulls up. It's the kid's father. "Get in the car, son," the dad yells. Rolling out of the other kids' grasp, the boy scrambles to his feet and stumbles to the car. They speed off. As the boy looks briefly out the window, he is sure the bullies are laughing. The boy is safe, but there's no way to count that as a win. An evacuation is not a victory.

The end of the Book of Revelation—the end of the Bible itself—shows us a picture not of our evacuation or escape but of God's arrival. Jesus conquered sin and death on the cross. In John's

gospel, Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished" (19:30). Here, in John's revelation, the one who is seated on the throne says, "It is done." The first statement was an announcement of completion; the second is a proclamation of things coming to pass. The victory of Jesus on the cross was made manifest in his resurrection, but it will arrive in fullness at his return.

We know that the season of Advent is a time of waiting between two arrivals. But the truth is, it is also a waiting between two *victories*. Jesus the Mighty One has overcome, and Jesus the Mighty One is coming again.

And when he comes, he comes to *dwell*. The vision of the end that Revelation provides is of God making heaven and earth new, uniting the new heaven and the new earth as one, and filling it with his presence



Jesus Is Our Peace

KELLY M. KAPIC

Two truths can be in conflict, and yet if they *are* true, we need to affirm them both.

First, our world is filled with genuine pain and trouble. As the Old Testament prophets warned, our rebellion against God has twisted us and our world. To pretend otherwise is to be naive at best or hard-hearted at worst. God doesn't ask us to lie about the hardships of life.

Second, Jesus is our peace—not in a cheap or cheesy way but in an earthy, knowing, cosmos-altering way. He is the only answer to this pain and trouble. Sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, the Son of God became fully and truly human. This God of peace breaks into our broken world as

one of us and starts a renewed world, realizing the ancient prophetic hope. “He himself is our peace,” since “in his flesh” he breaks down the “dividing wall of hostility”—not just between the sinner and God, but also between Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, heaven and earth (Gal. 3:28; Col. 1:15–22).

And these two truths clash.

Jesus is our peace, not merely in some psychological manner, but also in a concrete, whole-life way. He is our peace, not by numbing us, but by forgiving and healing us and enfold-ing us into in his love and life. Even in the darkness of night and when confusion, doubt, and chaos swirl, Jesus still says, “Do not let your hearts be



He Shines in the Darkness

CAROLYN ARENDS

The apostle John contextualizes his account of the words and deeds of his good friend Jesus with an opening prologue that crackles with energy and wonder. Jesus, John wants to tell us, is the very Word of God. He was with God at the creation of the world. He *is* God. He is life itself, and that life is the light of the world.

Then comes verse 5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” At least that’s what it says in my 2011 edition of the NIV. But here’s a striking thing: My older edition of the NIV (the 1984 translation) reads differently. It says, “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

The Greek word alternatively rendered “overcome” and “understood” is *katalambanó*—which means to “take hold of” or “grasp.” We need more than one English word to try to hint at the full gist of what John is saying here.

John has seen the Light of the World with his own eyes. He’s gone fishing with him. He’s eaten with him. He’s prayed with him. And he’s watched him endure the most horrific death imaginable and then *come back to life*. So John knows that there is no darkness in the universe that can permanently grasp and defeat this light. The darkness cannot *overcome* it.

But John also knows that our human minds, left to their own



Seeing Jesus, They Knew

KRISTIE ANYABWILE

Parenting is hard, and first-time parenting brings an added weight of difficulty. Everything is new—from feeling those first flutters of life in the womb to holding and seeing your child for the first time to the first bath, first feedings, first words, first steps. There are so many *firsts!*

Imagine what it was like for Joseph and Mary, traveling with their newborn from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. The trip would've taken a few hours on foot. In faithful obedience, they traveled for the first time as brand-new parents, participating in the custom of dedicating themselves and their child back to God.

All went according to custom until the righteous and devout Simeon arrived. He'd been waiting for the

deliverance of Israel, and entering the temple courts, he experienced a first. In that moment, God fulfilled his promise that Simeon would live to see the Messiah. Seeing the infant Jesus, he *knew*.

And Simeon didn't just see him—Simeon *held* him. In that moment, Simeon tangibly understood that God's salvation foretold by the prophets would be not only global in scale but also intimate and personal. Salvation itself was embodied in the cooing and wiggling infant in his arms. As Simeon worshiped and spoke of God's salvation, Mary and Joseph marveled, likely remembering the angels' instruction that they should name their child Jesus, a name that spoke of God's salvation.





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Ideas for Families

THROUGHOUT ADVENT

- With teens or preteens, read and discuss the devotions together each evening. With younger kids, focus on just the Scripture passages and reflection prompts.
- Begin a family journal for Advent. At the top of each page, write, “Jesus is . . .” After reading and discussing the day’s passage, invite family members to write a phrase or sentence or doodle an image to record their ideas about Jesus.

ANY TIME DURING ADVENT

- Put a simple puzzle together as a family *without* using a picture of the puzzle’s completed image. Afterward, discuss how seeing parts of the puzzle come together helped you see the big picture more clearly. Discuss how the Bible’s promises help us develop a fuller picture of who Jesus is.
- Play Who Am I? (also called 20 Questions) as a family. Discuss how the more we learn, the easier it is to identify or recognize someone. Talk about how Scripture’s promises about Jesus help us understand his identity.

WEEK 1: MIGHTY GOD

- Look together at baby pictures of each family member. Discuss the limitations and abilities of a human newborn. Explore how amazing it is that Jesus—the Mighty God—was born as a human infant.
- Use Legos, building blocks, or other craft supplies to create a castle. Talk together about the eternal kingdom and reign of God using ideas in Revelation 21:1–4.

WEEK 2: PRINCE OF PEACE

- Create placemats to use during Advent by coloring maps of the world. Discuss the idea that Jesus’ peace and the salvation he offers are for the whole world—for people of all nations, languages, and cultures.
- Invite everyone to name injustices, wrongs, sorrows, fears, or instances of violence in the world today that they long for Jesus to put right. Write them on pieces of construction paper. Together, tear those papers up, then glue the pieces together (text side down) in the shape of a cross to represent the ultimate peace Jesus will bring.

WEEK 3: LIGHT OF THE WORLD

- Go stargazing or look online at pictures from NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope. Discuss how light breaks through darkness—and how Jesus is like a light to us, shining even during dark times.
- Talk together about sharing the light of Jesus with others. Purchase glowsticks together and create tags with a simple message your children want to share, like “Jesus is the Light of the World. Jesus loves you!” Then walk or drive to nearby homes to give them to friends and neighbors.

WEEK 4: IMMANUEL

- As you walk through the stories and experiences of people in the Nativity, bring their experiences to life by discussing these questions together: What do you imagine this person felt, thought, or wondered? How do you imagine you’d react if you were in their place? Why?
- Make simple yarn or bead bracelets together and wear them daily during the week. Encourage your kids to remember this truth every time they see it: *God is with us*, right here, right now.