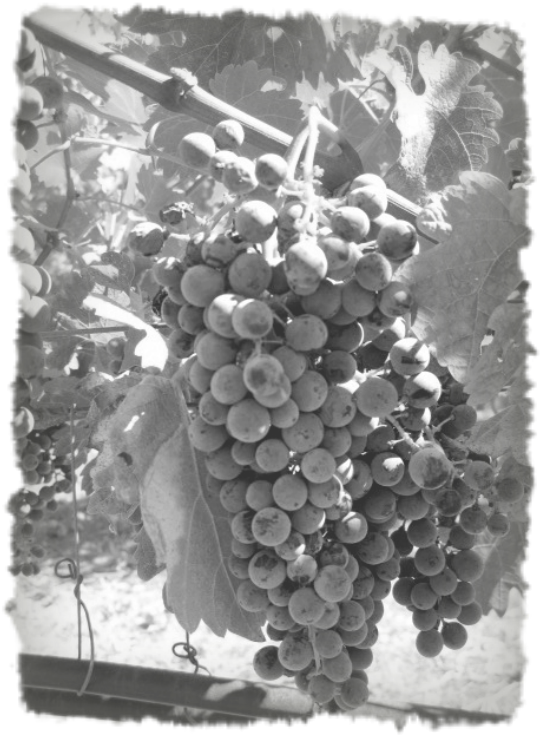
Experiencing Advent



The Christmas Pledge

During the season of Advent
I commit myself to . . .

Count my blessings

❊

"Help those who need help"
however God prompts me to do so

❊

Examine my holiday activities in light of
my deepest values

❊

Rededicate myself to my spiritual growth

THE eastsidevineyard® CHURCH

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Note: “The Christmas Pledge” on the cover of this handout was inspired by the Pledge found on the cover page of Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli, *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back Into the Season*, (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991).

A Letter from the Pastor

Friends -

Christmas Day is one of the most significant events in the history of the world. God took on flesh and was born into this world! And yet, with our overloaded schedules, every year it is easy to lose the true meaning of Christmas because we're so busy going shopping and attending parties. We might slow down enough to go to church on Christmas Eve, but that's about it. This year we want things to be different. That's why we created this handout… to guide you during the four weeks of Advent. May this entire December and Christmas Day itself never be the same for you.

Here are the first three steps to take on this journey . . .

Step 1
Take 15 minutes to read through this entire handout. This will give you an overview of the various spiritual practices you'll be engaging in during Advent as well as introduce you to 12 "ways" to live differently this December… so that it truly is the "most wonderful time of the year" instead of the most stressful.

Step 2
Go to the store and buy a notebook. This will become your "journal" over the next 4 weeks. Plus, purchase a Bible if you don't currently own one.

Step 3
Get out your calendar and circle **November 30th.** That is the start of Advent this year.

Thanks for joining me on this journey.

-Dan Kopp
Lead Pastor
The Eastside Vineyard Church
tevchurch.org

P.S. While you can go through this journey during Advent by yourself, we believe life change happens best in the context of community. Therefore, we hope everyone locks arms with others during Advent… whether it's with your small group, your family, or a good friend. See page 11 for more details.

12 "Ways" of Christmas

The 12 Days of Christmas is one of the most well known Christmas Carols… even if we don't remember if there were 8 or 7 "swans a swimming"! Instead of 12 Days of Christmas, here are 12 Ways of Christmas -- a dozen very practical ways to live differently from the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day.

1. Say "No" Often

In *Unplug the Christmas Machine* the authors write: *The month of December can be like an overfilled Christmas stocking, bursting with beautifully wrapped concerts, parties, family reunions, shopping expeditions, craft and baking projects, and special events*. All of these are "good" things to do but you cannot say yes to all of them (even though we try!). When we try to do everything, our joy is robbed from us. Learn to say "no" often this December. Stop saying "yes" to invitations when guilt or obligation are the driving factors and stop saying "yes" on impulse. Suggestion: Before committing to anything, talk about it with a trusted friend or family member and pray about it for 24 hours.

2. Give Gifts to Jesus on His Birthday

December 25th is the day we celebrate Jesus' birthday. Yet, we are typically the ones that receive all the gifts! This year give Jesus some gifts for His birthday. Thankfully, Jesus told us how to do exactly that. In Matthew 25:37-40 Jesus says when we do things for the poor and needy we are doing them for Him. Here's one way to give Jesus gifts for His birthday this year:

- Step 1. Determine what your gift budget is this year -- all the money you plan to spend on presents for all of your friends and family.
- Step 2. Take your total budgeted amount and split it (the exact percentage is up to you). Spend part of your gift budget on your friends and family and give the other portion away to charities that serve the poor and needy. This way, you aren't spending any more on gifts than you normally would; you are simply redirecting where the money is going so Jesus gets some gifts for His birthday. Suggestion: Pick out gifts for Jesus from His gift catalogs (these are online "catalogs" where you can pick and choose where you want to give your money in very specific ways):
    - Compassion International (compassion.com) - sponsor a child as a family this Christmas
    - Samaritan's Purse (samaritanspurse.org) - provide blankets, mosquito nets, medicine, etc.
    - World Vision (worldvision.org) - give the gift of food, medicine, and clean water to children
- Read Ann Voskamp's blog titled "Christmas: Thinking About Whose Birthday It Is" found on page 15 of this handout. She shares an inspiring story how her young son challenged the way they celebrated Christmas.

3. Friends & Family Fun Night

Pick one night of the week and make it "Friends & Family Fun Night" for the entire month of December. Once you decide which day (e.g., Fridays), get out your calendar and write "Fun Night" on every Friday night. Then if you get invited to another party or event on a Friday night (and trust me, you will!), you can say "Sorry, we already have plans" because you do! On your Fun Night, you can choose to do it as a immediate family… or you can invite some friends to join you… or you can do it over your parents' house. Some suggested activities:

- Spend an entire evening putting up and decorating the Christmas tree. Don't rush this activity. Turn on 100.3 FM and play Christmas music all night long.
- Bake Christmas cookies.
- Pop some popcorn, sit on the couch, and watch a classic Christmas program or movie like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* or *It's a Wonderful Life.*
- Put on some warm clothes and go out Christmas caroling in your neighborhood.

4. Serve Your "Neighbor" at Home

In *The Jesus Creed* Scot McKnight writes: *Sadly, far too many Christians love others with abandon while their own families are starving for their love. Let this be clear: our home is also in our neighborhood. It is attention grabbing to love the poor, to show compassion to AIDS sufferers, and to show mercy to victims. But it is attention-deflecting to wake up in the morning and ask, "What does my wife or husband, my daughter or son [or parent or roommate] need?" and then attend to those needs. It is easier to see love in the public square than to show love in the home. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is often misused here: as if love is shown only in the most extravagant of places, at the most unusual of times, and to the most needy of all persons. Not so, Jesus suggests: neighborly love begins in the home. In fact, if it is not shown in the home, it is a sham in public.* So this year serve your "neighbor" at home whether that neighbor is a spouse, your parents, or a friend. Help out in the kitchen. Wrap presents. Empty the dishwasher. Mop the floor. Do the laundry. Vacuum.

5. Help Those Who Need Help

Christmastime is usually all about us. All of our time and energy are inward focused while those in need are neglected. Compassion happens best in the context of relationships. Begin with your immediate circle of relationships: co-workers, single moms, single dads, neighbors, family members, and friends. How can you be a blessing to them? How can you show God's love in practical ways to them? (Some ideas: offer to babysit for a single parent who needs a night off // do yard work for an elderly person // provide meals for people who have a family member in the hospital // tutor a child in your neighborhood who is struggling in school). If there is no one in your immediate circle whom you can serve, contact a local charitable group. They will be able to put you to work! (see pages 17-18 for a list of organizations).

6. Christmas Carols on Christmas Morning

Christmas morning can be the most wonderful time of the year if you are surrounded by friends and family. But if you are a senior citizen living in a nursing home, Christmas morning can be the loneliest time of the year. Celebrate Christmas morning differently this year… and do it with The Eastside Vineyard Church! Get out of your PJ's, leave the gifts under the tree, get together folks you know at our church and do some Christmas caroling. Put a smile on the face of the elderly who are often forgotten during the holidays. And when you come on Christmas morning, be sure to bring the kids! It's a great way to show them the true meaning of Christmas.

Note: Christmas 2014 will mark the 5th year in a row that our church will be singing Christmas carols on Christmas morning. We are in the process of contacting a few local senior centers / nursing homes to line things up. Stay tuned for more details.

7. Simplify Your Gift Giving

Be the first person in your extended family to unplug from the Christmas machine. Instead of buying gifts for everyone (and shopping for hours on end, stressing out, and going into debt in the process), lead the charge in suggesting some alternatives to your family:

- Name drawing - put the family names in a hat and draw the name of one person to buy or make a gift for.
- Trimming a few names - talk with the people who you think might welcome an invitation not to exchange gifts with.
- Family gifts - give one gift per household instead of a gift for each separate individual.
- Just for kids - Only give presents to children in your extended family.
- Alternative gifts - instead of buying toys and more toys, buy a child or their family an annual zoo membership or something else they will be able to enjoy throughout the year.[1]

[1] These ideas were taken from Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli, *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back Into the Season*, p.97.

8. Rededicate Yourself to Your Spiritual Growth

Christmas Day is one of the most significant events in the history of the world. God took on flesh and was born into this world! And yet, with our overloaded schedules, every year we treat the true meaning of Christmas as a speed bump in our hectic lives. We might slow down enough to go to our church's Christmas service, but that's about it. This year we want things to be different. Here are some ideas to rededicate yourself to your spiritual growth this December:

- Read your Bible every day during Advent. Follow one of the Bible reading plans in this handout.
- Make church attendance a non-negotiable every single Sunday in December.
- Engage in the spiritual practices like fasting that are explained in this handout.
- Don't treat the Christmas service at church as something you have to do just to "get it out of the way." Make this the focal point of your calendar. **Note: This year, The Eastside Vineyard's Christmas Service will take place on Wednesday December 24th at 10:30am. Save the date…. and please invite your friends and family to attend as well. We will <u>not</u> be having services on December 25th (we plan to celebrate Christmas by caroling at a senior center that morning instead… see the previous page for more details.)**

9. Be a Peacemaker Within Your Circle of Family and Friends

"Peace on earth and goodwill toward men." That phrase is quoted by Linus in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and it originates in the Bible (see Luke 2:14). Unfortunately, Christmastime can bring about the exact opposite of peace and goodwill. Pledge to live differently this year. Do an intentional act of kindness toward a friend or family member with whom you are estranged. This is not an invitation to become a doormat (allowing them to walk all over you); it's simply an invitation to show God's love in practical ways to people whom you don't think deserve it.

10. The Christmas Story

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are typically all about parties and presents. While there is nothing wrong with those things, the spiritual aspects of Christmas often get pushed to the margins in the process. One way to reverse this is to spend a few minutes reading about the birth of Jesus from your Bible. On Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, grab a Bible and read The Christmas Story: Luke 1:26-38 (The Birth of Jesus Foretold), Luke 2:1-7 (The Birth of Jesus), and Luke 2:8-20 (The Shepherds and the Angels). After reading the story, spend some time talking about it.

11. Birthday Cake

If it's your birthday, two things are guaranteed: 1) people will sing "happy birthday" to you… 2) you'll have a birthday cake. That ritual happens for every person's birthday…except one: Jesus. Why? Why doesn't Jesus get "Happy Birthday" sung to Him on His birthday? Why doesn't He get a cake? You may think this sounds a bit cheesy or corny but here is a great way to remind yourselves and your kids what Christmas is all about -- bake a birthday cake and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus on December 25th this year. Make it special by having cake for breakfast on Christmas morning! (You can make it a little healthier by making it a carrot cake).

12. Read One of the Classics

Before the days of television, reading aloud was a favorite family past time. The season of Advent is a great time to revive this custom. Go to your local library, bookstore, or online and pick up one of these classics. Each of these are perfect for families to read together: *A Child's Christmas in Wales* by Dylan Thomas // *Old Christmas* by Washington Irving // *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens // *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry // *A Christmas Memory* by Truman Capote.[2]

[2] "Reading one of the Classics" was adapted from *Unplug the Christmas Machine*, pp.140-141.

Fasting 101

What is Fasting?

Fasting is a spiritual practice found throughout the Bible where people give up or abstain from something (typically food). See Luke 5:33-34, Matthew 4:1-4, and Jonah 3:5-10 for a few examples. Fasting is a great thing to do during Advent because it will cause you to simplify your life during the time of year when things usually get more complicated.

What Should I Fast From?

When people think of fasting, they typically picture giving up food for a certain amount of time. And while that is one way to do it, you can fast from all types of things . . .

- *TV* – Turn it off (and maybe your DVR too!).
- *Radio* – Stop listening to your favorite radio station when you're driving.
- *Computer* – Unplug your video game or take a break from Facebook or e-mail or the internet.
- *Certain Foods, Snacks, or Beverages* – You can give up a particular food, snack, or drink that you love whether it's pizza, chocolate, Pepsi, or whatever.
- *All Food* – You can skip one meal or not eat anything for an entire day.

How Often Should I Fast?

There are no rules to follow but here are some suggestions . . .

- If you choose to fast from some form of entertainment (e.g., TV, Facebook), you could do so for just one day per week during Advent or give it up altogether from now until Christmas.
- If you give up all food for an entire day, you may want to do that just once or twice during Advent. If you give up a certain food, snack, or beverage it may be best to give it up for all 4 weeks. If you fast from one meal out of the day, you may want to do that once a week.

What Else Should I Do?

Whatever you decide to fast from, take the time you would normally spend in that activity to love God and love others. Here are some examples… Take the time you normally would be eating (30 minutes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner) or on the computer or watching TV and spend that freed up time . . . Taking a walk in the woods. Reading your Bible individually or as a family. Serving your spouse by doing some housework. Praying. Serving the poor. Journaling. Being in community with your small group. Playing with your kids. Sitting silently.

Perspectives on Fasting

Here are some quotations from a handful of authors to help explain what fasting is and what it does:

> John Piper - "A Hunger for God" (p.10)
> *"Desire for other things" – there's the enemy. And the only weapon that will triumph is a deeper hunger for God. The weakness of our hunger for God is not because he is unsavory, but because we keep ourselves stuffed with "other things." Perhaps, then, the denial of our stomach's appetite for food might express, or even increase, our soul's appetite for God.*
>
> Richard Foster - "Celebration of Discipline" (p.60)
> *Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that will never happen in any other way. It is a means of God's grace and blessing . . .*
>
> Dallas Willard - "The Spirit of the Disciplines" (p.167)
> *Fasting teaches temperance or self-control and therefore teaches moderation and restraint with regard to all our fundamental drives. Since food has the pervasive place it does in our lives, the effects of fasting will be diffused throughout our personality.*

Bible Reading 101

How Do I Read My Bible During Advent?

There are two suggested Bible Reading Plans in this handout. One involves reading two gospels from start to finish (the only two that contain the story of Jesus' birth) while the other involves following the reading plan found in *The Book of Common Prayer* (which has been used by Christians from many different denominations since it was originally published in the 16th century.)

How Do I Use The Bible Reading Plans?

Do not feel like you have to read every one of the passages listed in either of the Bible Reading Plans on the following pages. Success is not measured by the number of pages read. The goal is not to get through all of the chapters or verses so you can check them off of your "things to do" list. The goal is to be transformed by what we read. For example, if you feel like the Holy Spirit is nudging you to "camp out" in a particular verse or chapter -- wanting you to keep reading and re-reading the same one for several days in a row -- then do it!

How Do I Use The Bible Reading Plan? (for Option 2 only)

The Book of Common Prayer lists five portions from the Bible each day: Psalms (in the morning), Psalms (in the evening), Old Testament, New Testament, and Gospel. Here are a few ways to get the most out of this reading plan. Read them over and pick the one that makes the most sense to you:

- **Option 1:** Pick one category (e.g., the Gospel reading or the Old Testament reading) and only read that portion each day. Ignore the rest of the categories. Act like they don't exist. Once you read your passage, get out your journal and capture your thoughts. See below for tips how to do this.
- **Option 2:** Start with the Psalms (Morning) and read until something "hits" you. In other words, read until something really jumps out at you / where you have an "a ha" moment / where you feel convicted or inspired by what you are reading. On one day, this might happen after you read just a couple verses in Psalms. On another day, it may not happen until you get to the Gospel portion. The key is this: whenever you have this "a ha" moment, stop reading. Spend the rest of your time journaling, thinking, and praying about the verse or verses that impacted you.
- **Option 3:** If you are naturally a fast reader, you could do a "wide reading" approach where you read every passage listed for each day. This is beneficial as it allows you to see the "big picture" and the key themes that led the creators of *The Book of Common Prayer* to group the passages the way they did.

What Questions Should I Be Asking When I Read?

As you read each passage from the Bible here are some questions to guide your thinking:

- What resonated with you?
- What were your "a ha" moments?
- What do you have questions about?
- Where was God speaking to you and what did he say?

As you read and reflect on what you read, use the notebook you purchased as your journal to capture your thoughts and answers to these questions. Use a new page in your notebook for each day of Advent. Write a few sentences or a few paragraphs each day, answering the above questions.

What If I Miss a Day?

If you miss a day of reading, give yourself grace. If (when!) this happens, you can choose to "make up" a day by reading two days worth the following day, or simply skip the reading you missed altogether. Be sure to read the three quotes at the bottom of this page so you have the right perspective about reading the Bible during Advent.

What if I Don't Understand What I'm Reading?

The important thing is to read each portion of Scripture slowly enough to think about and absorb what you are reading. You may even want to read a passage a few times. However, even after reading a particular passage a few times, you may be scratching your head and thinking, "Huh?" If that is the case, simply move onto the next passage listed on that day's reading. Don't get hung up on what you don't understand.

What about Study Bibles?

It would be a great idea to purchase a Study Bible. This type of Bible contains dozens of notes on every page that explain and unpack what you are reading. A lot of times people read verses from a book like Isaiah or First Thessalonians and wonder, "Who were those people? What does this verse or that verse mean? What is the context?" Study Bibles provide those answers. Here are some recommended ones to purchase: *The Quest Study Bible*, the *NIV Study Bible*, and the *ESV Study Bible*.

What does "Psalms (Morning)" and "Psalms (Evening)" mean?

The book of Psalms (the "P" is silent so it is pronounced "salms") was the original song book (hymnal) for believers in God. There are 150 individual Psalms that make up the book. According to the reading plan on page 12, it says "Psalms (Morning)" and "Psalms (Evening)". You are encouraged to read a Psalm or two in the morning. Then when you get into bed each night, turn off the TV or clock radio and grab your Bible. End your day by reading passages listed under Psalms (Evening). It would be the perfect way to end your day during each day of Advent....thinking about God.

Perspectives on Bible Reading

Here are some quotations from a handful of authors about reading the Bible:

> David Watson - "Fear No Evil: A Personal Struggle with Cancer" (pp.176-177)
> *To begin, choose a single piece of Scripture – one "thought" of God's – that you will live with for one day . . . Take, for example, this thought from Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God!" For one day, live with these words. Let your mind continually return to them in secret. "Today as best I can, I am going to be still. I am not going to chatter thoughtlessly. I will remember that I don't have to defend myself or make sure people think of me the way I want them to."*
>
> John Ortberg – "The Life You've Always Wanted" (p.187-188)
> *If we feed our souls regularly on God's Word, several times each day, we should become robust spiritually just as we feed on ordinary food several times each day, and become robust physically.*
>
> John Ortberg - "The Life You've Always Wanted" (p.190)
> *Success is not measured by the number of pages read. Sometime ago I set a goal of praying through the psalms, one psalm a day . . . But a strange thing happened. I found that my goal became to get through the psalms . . . Naturally, this utterly sabotaged God's real purpose in giving the psalms in the first place. God wants to speak to us, to renew us. And if he is using one psalm, or even one word, to do this, our job is to stick with it as long as it takes to learn what we need to learn. The goal is not for us to get through the Scriptures. The goal is to get the Scriptures through us.*

Prayer 101

How Do I Pray During Advent?

Learning to pray is a lifelong process. You'll never be an "expert." And there are many ways to do it. During this season of Advent, consider praying for one topic each day of the week (e.g., on Monday you pray for yourself; Tuesday for personal enemies, etc.). If having a scheduled time of prayer is new to you, start by praying just five minutes per day and then go from there. Here are some specific things to pray about under teach topic:

- Yourself: job, finances, emotional health, that God becomes more real to you, etc. Don't ever feel selfish praying for yourself. In fact, this is a great place to start as it cultivates your relationship with God.
- Personal Enemies: Jesus said, "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . ." (Matthew 5:44). Is there someone in your life that you don't get along with, someone you don't like? Pray for them!
- Key Relationships: One of the best things we can do for our spouse, children, parents, and friends is pray for God's direction and influence in their lives.
- Non-Christians: Is there someone in your life who is not a follower of Jesus? Pray that God softens their heart, that they become open to the gospel message, that an opportunity may arise to talk about spiritual things.
- Church: Pray for the leaders of your church by name. Pray that God leads them as they lead the church.
- Influencers: Pray for the President of the United States (regardless of whether or not you voted for him) and other people of influence around the world by name. Philip Yancey writes, "What about Islamic radicals who now oppose the West with violence? What effect might it have if every Christian church adopted the name of one Al-Queda member and prayed faithfully for that person?" (*Prayer*, p.310)
- The World: Pray for peace on earth and goodwill toward all men. Pray for peace in the parts of the world where there is violence. In heaven there is no war and no bloodshed. Pray that God's Kingdom may come and His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Perspectives on Praying

Here are some quotations from a handful of authors about praying:

> Greg Boyd - "Letters From A Skeptic" (pp.64-65)
> *The main purpose of talking to God (that's all prayer really is) has little to do with asking for things . . . It's to build a faith-filled, loving relationship with our Creator and Redeemer. What kind of relationship would I have with [my wife] if the only time we ever talked was to make requests of each other? Not much of one, I suspect. And so it is with God. The main function of prayer is simply to be with Someone you love: to talk, to listen, or to simply "commune" with your Creator.*
>
> John Ortberg - "The Life You've Always Wanted" (pp.94,95)
> *You don't know how many people have been strengthened because you asked God to encourage them; how many people have been healed because you prayed for their bodies; how many spiritual runaways have come home because you prayed for their souls. None of us may ever know the true effects of our prayers this side of death... [But] the Bible's teaching on prayer leads overwhelmingly to one conclusion: Prayer changes things.*

Small Group / Family Discussion

While you can go through this journey during Advent by yourself, we believe life change happens best in the context of community. Therefore, we hope everyone locks arms with others during Advent . . . whether it's with your small group, your family, or a good friend. We suggest you meet together once a week and go through the questions listed below each time you gather. It will be interesting how you answer this same list of questions differently as you progress in your journey through Advent this year.

1. Our goal in creating this Experiencing Advent journal is to help you live differently during the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas. Which of the *12 "Ways" of Christmas* (pp. 4-6) did you do this week? What have you experienced as a result? Be specific!

2. With all of the Bible reading you did this past week . . . What resonated with you? What were your "a ha" moments? What didn't make sense? What do you have questions about? Where was God speaking to you and what did He say? (Note: don't feel the need to answer every one of these questions. Each person can pick one or two to answer as you go around the room).

3. Of all of the things you prayed for this week, which did you feel most passionate to pray about? And if God answered any of your prayers this week, share them with the group.

4. Is there something you wrote in one of your daily journal entries this week that you didn't share when you answered Questions 1, 2, or 3? Here's your chance!

5. How has engaging in the spiritual practices (Bible reading, prayer, fasting, journaling) impacted you up to this point in the 4-week journey of Advent?

6. If you attended church this past weekend, was there anything you heard in the sermon or experienced in the service that was an "a ha" moment, something significant for you?

Bible Reading Plan (Option 1)
Two Gospels

This page contains a Bible Reading Plan for Advent. It contains a day-by-day guide so if you follow it, you will read two gospels between now and Christmas Eve. We chose Matthew and Luke because they are the only two gospels that contain the story of Jesus' birth. Each gospel paints a "portrait" of Jesus and by reading these two biographies back-to-back, you will gain insight and perspective into the life of Jesus like never before. See pages 6-7 for ideas how to get the most out of this reading plan. ***Tip: tear out this page, fold it in half and use it as a bookmark in your Bible so you have this reading plan at your fingertips.***

November 30 - Luke 1-2

December 1 - Luke 3-4

December 2 - Luke 5-7

December 3 - Luke 8-9

December 4 - Luke 10-11

December 5 - Luke 12-13

December 6 - Luke 14-16

December 7 - Luke 17-18

December 8 - Luke 19-21

December 9 - Luke 22-23

December 10 - Luke 24

December 11 - Matthew 1-2

December 12 - Matthew 3-4

December 13 - Matthew 5-7

December 14 - Matthew 8-9

December 15 - Matthew 10-11

December 16 - Matthew 12-13

December 17 - Matthew 14-15

December 18 - Matthew 16-17

December 19 - Matthew 18-19

December 20 - Matthew 20-21

December 21 - Matthew 22-23

December 22 - Matthew 24

December 23 - Matthew 25-26

December 24 - Matthew 27-28

Bible Reading Plan (Option 2)

The Book of Common Prayer

This page contains a Bible Reading Plan for Advent. It was adapted from the Book of Common Prayer so you will be reading the same Scriptures that millions of Christians around the world are reading on the same day! You will all be on the same page... literally. Each day contains a portion of Scripture from the Psalms, Old Testament, New Testament, and a Gospel. Do <u>not</u> feel like you have to read every one of them! The goal is not to get through all the verses so you can check them off of your "things to do" list. The goal is to be transformed by what we read. See page 8 for ideas how to get the most out of this reading plan.

November 30
First Sunday of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 146, 147
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 111, 112, 113
Old Testament	Isaiah 1:1-9
New Testament	2 Peter 3:1-10
Gospel	Matthew 25:1-13

December 1
Monday of the First Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 1, 2, 3
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 4, 7
Old Testament	Isaiah 1:10-20
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Gospel	Luke 20:1-8

December 2
Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 5, 6
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 10, 11
Old Testament	Isaiah 1:21-31
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Gospel	Luke 20:9-18

December 3
Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 119:1-24
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 12, 13, 14
Old Testament	Isaiah 2:1-11
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
Gospel	Luke 20:19-26

December 4
Thursday of the First Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 18:1–19
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 18:20–50
Old Testament	Isaiah 2:12-22
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 3:1-13
Gospel	Luke 20:27-40

December 5
Friday of the First Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 16, 17
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 22
Old Testament	Isaiah 3:8-15
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
Gospel	Luke 20:41-21:4

December 6
Saturday of the First Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 20, 21
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 110, 116, 117
Old Testament	Isaiah 4:2-6
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Gospel	Luke 21:5-19

December 7
Second Sunday of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 148, 149, 150
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 114, 115
Old Testament	Isaiah 5:1-7
New Testament	2 Peter 3:11-18
Gospel	Luke 7:28-35

December 8
Monday of the Second Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 25
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 9, 15
Old Testament	Isaiah 5:8-23
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Gospel	Luke 21:20-28

December 9
Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 26, 28
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 36, 39
Old Testament	Isaiah 5:13-25
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Gospel	Luke 21:29-38

December 10
Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 38
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 119:25–48
Old Testament	Isaiah 6:1-13
New Testament	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
Gospel	John 7:53-8:11

December 11
Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 37:1–17
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 37:18–40
Old Testament	Isaiah 7:1-9
New Testament	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Gospel	Luke 22:1-13

December 12
Friday of the Second Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 31
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 35
Old Testament	Isaiah 7:10-25
New Testament	2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
Gospel	Luke 22:14-30

December 13
Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 30, 32
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 42, 43
Old Testament	Isaiah 8:1-15
New Testament	2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
Gospel	Luke 22:31-38

December 14
Third Sunday of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 63, 98
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 103
Old Testament	Isaiah 13:6-13
New Testament	Hebrews 12:18-29
Gospel	John 3:22-30

December 15
Monday of the Third Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 41, 52
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 44
Old Testament	Isaiah 8:16-9:1
New Testament	2 Peter 1:1-11
Gospel	Luke 22:39-53

December 16
Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 45
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 47, 48
Old Testament	Isaiah 9:1-7
New Testament	2 Peter 1:12-21
Gospel	Luke 22:54-69

December 17
Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 119:49–72
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 49
Old Testament	Isaiah 9:8-17
New Testament	2 Peter 2:1-10a
Gospel	Mark 1:1-8

December 18
Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 50
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 33
Old Testament	Isaiah 9:18-10:4
New Testament	2 Peter 2:10b-16
Gospel	Matthew 3:1-12

December 19
Friday of the Third Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 40, 54
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 51
Old Testament	Isaiah 10:5-19
New Testament	2 Peter 2:17-22
Gospel	Matthew 11:2-15

December 20
Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 55
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 138, 139
Old Testament	Isaiah 10:20-27
New Testament	Jude 17-25
Gospel	Luke 3:1-9

December 21
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 24, 29
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 8, 84
Old Testament	Isaiah 42:1-12
New Testament	Ephesians 6:10-20
Gospel	John 3:16–21

December 22
Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 61, 62
Psalms (Evening)	Psalm 112, 115
Old Testament	Isaiah 11:1-9
New Testament	Revelation 20:1-10
Gospel	John 5:30-47

December 23
Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 66, 67
Psalms (Evening)	116, 117
Old Testament	Isaiah 11:10-16
New Testament	Revelation 20:11-21:8
Gospel	Luke 1:5-25

December 24
Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Psalms (Morning)	Psalm 45, 46
Psalms (Evening)	[none]
Old Testament	Isaiah 35:1-10
New Testament	Revelation 22:12-21
Gospel	Luke 1:67-80

Christmas: Thinking about Whose Birthday It Is

by Ann Voskamp
aholyexperience.com (posted on 11.17.10)

It's been over ten years of nothing under the Christmas tree here. Strange, the way children teach men. It was dark, I do remember that. Bedtime. Smoothing back hair, kissing foreheads. One round moon hanging large outside the window, an ornament dangling off stars, decorating the night. I had gifts to wrap. So, pull up the blankets. Prayers.

And then, when I'm at the door, one hand on the doorframe, resting in the light of the hallway, I turn to close the door a bit on the dark and he stops me with just one question:

"What does Jesus get for His birthday?"

The words hung… strung me up. I say the words into the black. Um… A cake? Our love? I can hear him turn again in the bed, roll over on the pillow. Restless…

"But Mom…. if we get wrapped presents for our birthdays, real sacrifices from people who love us — they gave up other things to give something to us — then why don't we do that for Jesus' birthday?"

I stand at the door looking into all that light cast down the hallway. Why is the sky blue, why do we blink, how do clouds hold all that water, the children ask me a thousand questions and the world spins dizzy on a million questions I don't know the answers to and I stand in the dark, the light right there, and I grope for the answer that could change the world…

"Why don't we give up things so we can give to Jesus for His birthday?"

Is it always this way, that a little child will lead them? He was four or five that year, I can't remember. I just know that now he's fifteen and I stepped out into the light and we've done all the Christmases since his way, giving away. It's not at all wrong to do it differently, but just for us… all the Christmas gifts — gifts for the Christ Child.

I shamefully confess I thought it would somehow make me sad. I am a very slow learner. How could I have thought that only love under the tree would do anything but make our happiness flourish?

The Birthday Child tells us what He wants: Give to the least of these and you give to Me. So this is how we do it: We pick out gifts from His gift catalogues — Compassion Catalog, Samaritan's Purse Catalog, Partner's International Catalog,World Vision Catalog,Gospel for Asia Catalog, and MCC Catalog.

It happens after breakfast, each day for the last two weeks of Advent, selecting one gift for He who is Christmas. They flip pages, deciding on what to give Him today:

"Anyone think we should get a pair of rabbits today?"

"I was thinking mosquito nets. Two. I wouldn't want to die of malaria."

"If we buy a seed packet for a family, our gift is tripled. Did you read the story on page 25 about what a difference it makes for an orphan family to have seeds? The little girl said, 'Life is much better with food.'"

"Why are you crying, Mama?"

"Oh, just thinking… how life really is much better with food…"

I'm sitting at the table with the kids all bent over The King's Catalogues when I finally get what the kids already know: I'd rather only fill a child's tummy than fill my house with anymore things. Maybe that's always the only choice we have to make every Christmas: feed our own fickle wishes or feed the real

hunger of Christ? Nothing can be claimed, taken, received, had; everything we have is gift to us from heaven. All that we have has no other source but the hand of God (Jn 3:27).

So Christian hands never clasp and He doesn't give us gifts for our gain because a gift can never stop being a gift— it is always meant to be given.

When we pass our gifts on — the gifts from Him remaining a gift and being given again — we are the ones given even more of the source of all gifts — more of God Himself. Filled. When we give to Christ in the hungry, He satisfies our own hunger pangs.

A decade of this, our little family turning the Christmas tree upside down and letting gifts all fall into the hands of the poor and some thought it too strange, all this with no bows under the tree and I really understood but we couldn't stop seeing just this, Him hanging on a tree. It's just the way He's just spoken to us, that's all.

And then yesterday, my Dad, he stood in our kitchen, his hand on the counter, his farm coveralls still on, him just driving by, and he said it quiet, *"I think this year — we shouldn't do gifts as a family."* He looked up at me. My eyebrows arched. He understood?

"I was thinking that this year — maybe we should just all go together — and see if we can help drill a well in Africa."

And that one boy now fifteen, who asked a question that answered everything, he turns to me, his smile lighting the room and all the world.

"Helping Those Who Need Help"
A List of Organizations

Here are a list of organizations where you and your family can help those who need help during the season of Advent and beyond. Note: Some organizations require an orientation or training or background checks before you can serve with them so be sure to contact them well in advance to make sure you, your family, or your small group can serve on the date you want.

Your "Neighbor"
Compassion happens best in the context of relationships. Begin with your immediate circle of relationships: co-workers, single moms, single dads, neighbors, family members, and friends. Even if they aren't homeless, how are they in need? How can you be a blessing to them? How can you show God's love in practical ways to them? (Some ideas: offer to babysit for a single parent who needs a night off // do yard work for an elderly person // provide meals for people who have a family member in the hospital // tutor a child in your neighborhood who is struggling in school). If there is no one in your immediate circle whom you can serve, contact a local charitable group as listed below. They will be able to put you to work!

Habitat for Humanity - Macomb County
Macomb County Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit, ecumenical Christian based, housing ministry that provides low-income, working families the opportunity to purchase safe, decent, affordable housing in which to raise their families. Habitat was founded in the belief that every man, woman, and child should have a decent, affordable place to live, where they may dwell in dignity and safety. No experience required! You don't need to be an expert at swinging a hammer to serve with Habitat for Humanity.
website: macombhabitat.org
e-mail: volunteer@macombhabitat.org
phone: 586.263.1540

Central Detroit Christian (CDC)
Through education, employment and economic development, Central Detroit Christian (CDC) strives to instill hope, faith and values while inspiring individuals within the community to reach their highest potential as confident, productive and caring community leaders and citizens. Volunteers are needed several days of the week for various programs. For example, spend a Tuesday night pouring into under-privileged, elementary-age kids -- begin by eating dinner with them and then be part of the team that helps them with subjects they are struggling with in school as well as teaching them about God's love for them.
Website: www.centraldetroitchristian.org
E-mail: dfoster@detcdc.org
Phone: 313.873.0064

God's Helping Hands
Provides free food and clothing for those in need. A Christian organization. Members of our church have volunteered here in the past and connected with Lisa Cain, the president and co-founder.
Location: 1866 Star-Batt, Rochester Hills, MI 48309
e-mail: godshelpinghands@comcast.net
phone: 248.852.7400

Open Hands Food Pantry
Open Hands Food Pantry provides emergency food and toiletries to residents of Oakland County.
When: Every Saturday at 9:30 a.m. and every Monday at 1:00 p.m.
Location: St. John's Episcopal Church 26998 Woodward Ave., Royal Oak MI 48067
e-mail: pantry@openhandspantry.info
phone: 248.546.1255

Communi-D BBQ - Detroit OR Mount Clemens
We'll be hanging out with our friends (both the homeless and those who are not homeless) in "The Clem" and in "The D." Notice this is a time WITH the community, not for. This is an opportunity to meet and hang out with some people who we don't already know. Let's show God's love in a practical way by having a BBQ with those in need.
When: Saturdays at 1pm. Location: Shadyside Park / 166 Barbara St. / Mount Clemens, MI or Redmond Plaza / 2nd Ave. & Selden St. / Detroit, MI 48201
Website: elevatedetroit.com
E-mail: mike@elevatedetroit.com

Macomb County Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers
A non-profit organization that provides assistance to older and disabled adults in our community. Our services include: light housework and meal preparation // transportation to doctor appointments and essential errands // minor home repairs, maintenance, chores, and yard work // friendly visits and supportive phone calls for the lonely and disabled.
Contact: 586.757.5551

Hope Center in Macomb
With volunteers such as you we will be able to provide food for thousands of families in need each month. We are always looking for individuals or groups (ask your employer about getting your company involved!) who can get involved in our mission. Some of the volunteer opportunities available are: Pantry Stocking // Pantry Checkout // Pantry Intake // Pantry Host // Reception Desk // Greeter // Data Entry // Plus Many More!!
Where: 33222 Groesbeck Hwy, Fraser, MI 48026
Website: hopecentermacomb.org
Contact: Tammy at 248.761.5863 or Lisa at 586.294.HOPE.

Grace Centers of Hope
Every year volunteers give thousands of hours to help care for the homeless, abused, and addicted at Grace Centers of Hope. Without their help, we would indeed be defeated! More than 500 volunteers a month give their precious time to Grace Centers to do everything from helping to cook and serve meals, to sorting food in the pantry, to counseling, and caring one-on-one for the men, women, and children who have come to rely on their "special friends."
Contact: Mary Beth Harvill, Volunteer Coordinator, Ext. 34 or mharvill@gracecentersofhope.org or Marilyn Macadaeg, Assistant Volunteer Coordinator, Ext. 17 or mmacadaeg@gracecentersofhope.org
Website: gracecentersofhope.org