

Hope ~ Peace ~ Joy ~ Love

ADVENT

A Gospel-Centered Christmas

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Week #1 ~ Hope

November 29 ~ December 2018



WORSHIP FULLY

Our Prayer Priorities

Pray through our Prayer Priorities for the year. Pay attention to what God is saying to you and to the church as you pray.

PRAYER: We pray for an increase in personal and corporate prayer at the Forge and for testimonies of lives changed by prayer. We pray by name for those each of us know who are not following Christ.

FORMATION: We pray that we increasingly Live our Covenant by a culture shift, to being shaped by shared practices and to a discipleship community who share formation, growth and thriving.

LEADERSHIP: We pray for children and youth leaders. We pray for finances that exceed our needs & creates opportunities to give of our excess and for an increase of three new people on the Finance Team.

PROPERTIES: We pray for the immediate maintenance needs of our property: sewer; roof; paving and for the maintenance improvements that are wants or will need to be done in the next several years.

NEIGHBOURHOOD: We pray for our new neighbour, Charter, to prosper and to realize their dream of moving into their new space by early 2019. We pray to become more 'seen' in our neighborhood as a place where one finds belonging, believing and becoming.

LINKED: We pray for the ministries we participate in and support beyond the Forge Church. We pray for God's guidance as we pray and discern group mission in our future.

This then is to watch: to be detached from what is present, and to live in the thought of Christ as he came once, and as he will come again; to desire his second coming from our affectionate and grateful remembrance of his first.” ~ John Henry Newman, 19th Century English Bishop
Let’s approach Christmas with an expectant hush, rather than a last minute rush. ~ Author Unknown

“At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God’s own love and concern.” ~ Mother Teresa, Love: A Fruit Always in Season

“Christmas has lost its meaning for us because we have lost the spirit of expectancy. We cannot prepare for an observance. We must prepare for an experience.” ~ Handel Brown

“Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that things—the weather, human relationship, the economy, the political situation, and so on—will get better. Hope is trust that God will fulfill God’s promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom.” ~ Henri Nouwen

Introduction

We are products of our culture, whether it is the culture in the broader world or the culture in the places we spend our time in.” Does this quote sound vaguely familiar? It should, we’ve been saying it. Repeatedly. Over the past ten weeks and since the beginning of this year when we embarked on a journey of shifting our church culture.

What we have been learning together is that our understanding of the glorious Good News/Gospel of the Kingdom of God is pretty thin. Pretty rote. Pretty meh. In the In-Between series we began to glimpse what a thick full Gospel-culture can look like in-between the stories of Christmas and Easter. And then we land at this point; Advent; the expectation of the Christmas story. We must ask ourselves in what ways has the culture we are shaped by influenced how we observe the Christmas Story?

Yesterday as I headed up the stairs of BC Ferries from the car deck, I came face to face with a larger than me sign right at the top of the stairs: “Spend More, Stress Less.”

Read it again. Yes, it really does say that. It then directed me to the Gift Shop on board the ferry. The irony of this slogan did not escape me. Our Christmas-culture has us convinced that spending lots of money on ‘stuff’ and giving lots of ‘stuff’ to people who pretty much already have lots of ‘stuff’, is the way to experience and convey peace, joy, hope and love.(I recently read in a LA Times cited survey that the average American home holds 300,000 items!)

“Each year many of us routinely miss the wonder of God’s miraculous birth...But our overstuffed Decembers leave us wanting more. Our hyper-consumption leaves us empty. We worship less. We spend more. We give less. We struggle more.” Rick McKinley, Advent Conspiracy

What if we **Worship Fully; Spend Less, Give More and Love All**? Wouldn’t that be a truer version of the Christmas Story than what our culture has made of it all?

Along with a growing number of passionate pursuers of Christ, and in the spirit of continuing to grow deeper into our Gospel understanding of the God-who-looks-for-us and finally sends himself in the flesh to be Christ-With-Us, we are looking at what Advent and Christmas look like for kingdom of God citizens.

Somehow, these four things sound more like the thick gospel than what we actually tend to practice.

Come along with us as we discover together The Story that places the divine within our tangible reach and honestly ask ourselves, “where is this Immanuel, this God-with-Us, in our Advent?” - Shannon Youell

Advent Challenge

In this vein, as a community that proclaims Jesus is Lord, we will be taking a challenge together. World wide it's called the Advent Conspiracy. Can we intentionally plan to spend less on gifts than we usually do and take that money to ease the pain of those who suffer? Our challenge is to donate 1000 meals to Our Place Society. We are asking each and everyone of us to consider this. The price? \$3110.20. This is about what we collect during a spontaneous “love offering”, so we know this is doable. We are not asking you to “add” this expense to what can be a financially challenging time. We are asking you to spend less on your family and friends and help those truly in need. To be deliverers of God's justice, peace-making, love for the poor and marginalized, hope, joy, peace and love.

Join us. Let's make Advent Wondrous again! Let's make Christmas truly about the things of God's heart revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

HEART
Thursday, November 29
WEEKLY PRAYER RHYTHM

Daily Morning Prayer

*Advent God, we worship you: The God who comes.
You are not remote from the world you have made,
But each day you come to us,
Blessing us with your presence.*

*Grant us the grace to welcome your coming.
Inflame our love to yearn for your presence.
Enlarge our vision to recognize your coming day by day.
We greet you, Advent God.*

Be attentive to where God is at work throughout your day.

Daily Evening Prayer

*Lord show me where you came to us today. To me.
Reveal to me where I was a channel of your hope to those I encountered today.
Forgive me where I did not recognize your presence as I went through my day.
Enlarge my vision to recognize you tomorrow in each place I am.*

Where did you see God at work around you? Write your story down. Gospel yourself and one another with the story.

Prayer Journal

Journal what you hear God saying to you through these prayers this week. How has praying these prayers helped you to grow closer to God? How has praying these prayers grown you in other ways?

God, as I pray the prayer priorities I hear You saying to our church...

MIND
Friday, November 30

Read Luke 2:8–20.

The shepherds are well-known participants in the Christmas narrative. Think about images you have seen on traditional Christmas cards, nativity scenes, or even the way shepherds are portrayed in a typical church Christmas program. How have we been led to picture these first visitors to the manger?

In this passage, we are told that the shepherds were a socially despised group (poor, criminal, outcast). Can you think of any parallels to this group today?

The shepherds are the first ones to whom the angels announced the birth of Christ. What does that tell us about the heart of God toward social outcasts? How does this relate to the message of Christmas?

In what ways does the worship of the shepherds differ from our celebration of Christmas? What are some specific ways in which our contemporary celebration of Christmas moves us away from the worship the shepherds experienced? What can we do to recapture that sense of wonder and gratitude?

STRENGTH
Saturday, December 1
Advent Reading, Day 1 ~ John 1:1-5



WORSHIP FULLY

Nearly every character in the Christmas story that encountered our King responded in the same way: worship. Let's make the conscious effort to reorient our hearts toward Christ. Christmas began with worship; may it end with worship.



SPEND LESS

In our hearts we know mindless consumption is not the way to celebrate Jesus. But spending less does not mean spending nothing. Rather we will thoughtfully evaluate what companies and causes we support through our purchases.



GIVE MORE

The best gifts celebrate a relationship and most often they require our time and energy. Relational giving means that we think about the other person—who they are and what they care about. We focus more on giving our undivided presence and less on a pile of presents under the tree.



LOVE ALL

Christmas is a chance to move closer to those in crisis. We will love others as Jesus has loved us. The poor and hurting of our world can be reached by God through the way we choose to celebrate Christmas.

ONE ANOTHER: PREPARE

Sunday, December 2

Advent Reading, Day 2 ~ Jeremiah 33:14-16

Read Psalm 138.

Mary quotes from this psalm in her worship song of praise in Luke (1:48). God, has looked upon the earth, seen her, and will fulfill his purpose for her, for Israel and for all humanity for he does not abandon the works of his hands.

Her song is filled with hope. Hope of God who is looking for us and comes to be with us. Read Mary's whole song in Luke 1. Look for her statements of hope and know she is quoting scriptures throughout that spill hope into the world.

To prepare for our First Sunday of Advent gathering read Psalms 150. What resonates with you personally and what doesn't? What is the author speaking to you/us about worship?

Pray for our gathering today.

SERMON NOTES
Sunday, December 2

NEIGHBOUR
Monday, December 3
Advent Reading, Day 3 ~ Luke 1:5-10

“Like Mary, we will sing to our redeeming God. Like Joseph, we will obey without regard to the cost. Like the shepherds, we will leave our busyness to worship Christ. Like the Magi, we will confront anything that stands in the way of our worship, whether worldly empires or our own fears.” ~ Rick McKinley. Advent Conspiracy: Can Christmas Still Change the World?

Who do you most identify with in the Christmas story – Mary (Luke 1), Elizabeth (Luke 1), Joseph (Matthew 1), the Shepherds (Luke 2), or the Magi (Matthew 2)?

Each character worshiped God in their own, unique way. How do you best worship God?

As we look at these characters and their stories, there are 3 things that can be seen in their worship: PRAY, SERVE & TELL. What can you be doing to worship God this way in your neighbourhood?

Youell Family Christmas

My adult children, who now have small children of their own, love Christmas. have (mostly) happy memories of our Christmases together. We often talk, around this time a year, what is it that made Christmas so enjoyable for them. will tell you it was their stockings, stuffed full of inexpensive trinkets and fun things. Their new pair of pyjamas and slippers. Their one thought through gift from mom and dad. they couldn't get out of bed until they "heard" the Christmas music. Or couldn't open gifts until their Dad arrived home from helping his Dad milk the cows on Christmas morning. We didn't have piles of presents. because we were 'poor', but because it was a decision to spend less and give more. More blessing, more time, more presence with others.

They will tell you it's the times our friend's pond froze, and we had a community ice skating party replete with hot chocolate and hockey; the annual trek under the hydro lines to find the perfect Charlie Brown Christmas Tree (and the time the police showed up at the door afterwards!). piling into two or three vans and driving to the homes of people who had less or had blessed us in ways big and small over the year, surprising them with gifts of food and hand crafts we had spent a month together making with other families in our community.

They'll tell you about some of the 'strange' guests who joined us for Christmas dinner-homeless Doug being one of their favorite stories (one year they asked me if we could just have a 'normal' Christmas with no strangers at

the table, but I knew they didn't really mean it). And looking back, they didn't-because they are fast to ask if 'someone with no family or no where else to go' can join us at our table.

I was very intentional to keep Christmas as our culture celebrates it and Jesus quite separate. Don't get me wrong, I quite like Christmas as a holiday. However, the things we do in excess on that holiday really have little to do with experiencing the wonder of the manger where the shadow of the cross is veiled behind it. It has little to do with God-looking-for-us, now among us and how that changes how we love the world he so loves. What I don't like about Christmas is the amount of stress and busyness that leaves us so exhausted and empty at the end of it.

Advent or Expectation is about waiting and being surprised by the wonder of encountering God more fully, more deeply and participating in his kingdom idea of heaven on earth more wholeheartedly. It leads to rest-fullness, not rest-deprived-ness. It fills our hearts with lasting joy, not the deflated buyer's remorse, standing in the return line deception of 'buying more joy'.

I think the Apostle Paul sums it all up best in his letter to the Philipians: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." Phil 2:1-3.

- Shannon Youell

ONE ANOTHER: PRACTICE

Tuesday, December 4

Advent Reading, Day 4 ~ Luke 1:11-17

“The Advent season is our chance to celebrate the wondrous moment when God entered our world to make things right. It is a season of worship.”

What practical choices do you need to make to ensure that the Christmas season remains a time of focused worship?

How might you remind and encourage each other as friends to do this? As a family? As a church?

Shared Practices

Heart – Morning and evening prayer so that we become aware of God’s presence in our lives.

Mind – Daily Scripture reading so that we are formed by God’s story.

Strength – Practicing a growing generosity through monthly tithing and a yearly assessment of our personal debt.

Neighbour – Practicing hospitality so that we intentionally develop relationships in order to share our story in light of God’s story.

One Another – Blessing each other by gathering on Sunday and connecting during the week.

ONE ANOTHER: GOSPELLING EACH OTHER

Wednesday, December 5

Advent Reading, Day 5 ~ Luke 1:18-25

Prepare for your group tonight by reflecting on the following questions:

Do you still look forward to the Christmas season? If so, what do you enjoy about the season?
If you no longer look forward to Christmas, why not?

What word would best describe what you want to experience this year during the Christmas season? What are some obstacles that get in the way of that happening?

Looking at the Advent Conspiracy challenge (**Worship Fully, Spend Less, Give More, Love All**), how can we encourage and spur one another on, practically?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

What did you learn?

From the sermon on Sunday? From your time with Jesus? From conversations with one another?

What perspective changed for you?

What difference has it made in your life?

What is God asking us to do?