

# ADVENT Bible Reading Schedule

## 2 Weeks

### WEEK 1

#### DAY 1 – Isaiah 9:1-7

This is possibly the most well-known and famous prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. There are many statements in this chapter that point to the coming of Christ and what he would mean to us. Some of them are so powerful that you might miss the more subtle promise of Galilee in verse 1. “There will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory.” That is an impressive promise because this northern area of Israel is often overlooked and ruled by others. The dawning of a great light coming from Galilee would be one of the last places Jews would expect. Plus, this region was heavily influenced by Gentile culture and, by and large, would not be attractive to the Jewish establishment. To me, this makes Isaiah’s prophecy even more powerful because it clearly tells us that the long-awaited One would rise out of Galilee which is exactly what happened. As Isaiah wrote these words, many Israelites would be severely oppressed by the Assyrians in slavery. The promise speaks to the specific situation and reflects the heart of God to deliver his people. The “son given” would bring justice and righteousness and his kingdom would last forever. He would rule a kingdom of peace that has arrived but we still wait for the reign of the Prince of Peace which will never end. Don’t you just love the titles Isaiah gives to our Savior? There are four descriptive titles that reveal the character of Christ in such a full way. Which of those are you most drawn to? Why? I am reminded of what Gabriel said to Mary, “He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:32-33)

#### DAY 2 – Isaiah 11

I want to remind you that Isaiah wrote these words 700 years before Christ’s birth. Isaiah often gives detailed connections that make these prophecies even more inspiring. As is often true, the message applied to Isaiah’s day, it also points to the first coming of Christ as a descendent of David and then we read words that are forecasted to be true when Christ fully establishes his Kingdom in the age to come as “the wolf and the lamb will live together.” The Father would send his Son who would be filled with the Spirit. Isaiah repeats this statement several times when speaking of the Messiah, the Lord’s Servant; “the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...” (Verse 2) You probably recognize similar words in this chapter as with yesterday. Justice is central to the Messiah (Verse 4) and peace (Verse 8) which is for the whole world (Verse 10). The first part of this chapter highlights a new Branch as the promised deliverer. The middle section gives us a glimpse of the Lord’s forever Kingdom and the final section speaks specifically

to the oppression of the Assyrians on God's people. The Lord will always keep a people for himself even if it is but a "remnant" of the whole. Isaiah affirms God's plan to take a small remnant and expand his influence through them for all of Israel and even the Gentile nations. "All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance." (Isaiah 60:3) Not only Isaiah, but the Bible as a whole, points to the expanding growth of God's rule through his Son over the whole world. "The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory." (Revelation 21:24) Advent celebrates the coming of Jesus as a baby. But Advent also anticipates the forever glory of our God reigning over all. This is meant to stir our faith and strengthen our hope. How has this powerful chapter spoken to you?

#### DAY 3 – Isaiah 40:1-11

This is one of the most familiar Old Testament prophecies. I recall Eric Liddell, in *Chariots of Fire*, reading this chapter from a pulpit in England. All 31 verses are incredible but the first eleven are especially messianic. You could land on almost any verse in this first section and find yourself riveted to the significance of Isaiah's words. Who doesn't want "comfort?" What about the famous words that John the Baptist lived out in verses 3-5 as the voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord? You can't miss the significance of God's Word which will last forever and you have the character of God, both tough and tender, portrayed in the last two verses of our section. There's enough to chew on, for sure. Tucked away in these 11 verses is the promise of the Lord's coming. "O Zion, messenger of good news, shout from the mountaintops... 'Your God is coming.'" (Verse 9) This is the message of Advent both in Bethlehem and on the clouds one day when Jesus returns to earth in triumph. How do you respond to this powerful message from Isaiah? Verse 8 has my attention this time. I am likened to grass and fading flowers in verse 6. Comparatively, the Word of God stands forever. As my life progresses into the last quarter of my earthly journey, I am more aware of how fast and fading this life is on earth for us. What God says lasts. I can put too much emphasis on the day-to-day ups and downs of life. In verses 3 & 4, I am reminded that God can be trusted and he will straighten everything out according to his will. These words are an anchor for me. I appreciate God's Word; I am lifted up by the Lord; I am held in his arms! Overall, these are comforting words. How do they comfort you? What are you holding on to after reading these verses?

#### DAY 4 – Isaiah 42:1-9

Often when Isaiah is prophesying about the Messiah, he refers to him as "My Servant," or the "Servant of the Lord." This reference is coupled with "my chosen one" and "I will put my Spirit on him." (Verse 1) This is the first of four Servant songs (Isaiah 49, 52 & 53). This song describes Jesus the Messiah and his ministry. No description could be more encouraging to us as we seek deliverance and healing for wounded emotions. There's no question about the Lord's gentleness. He will encourage us and bring justice for the wrongs we have suffered. Prison Fellowship highlighted verse 3 as a theme for their ministry, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." (NIV) Matthew 12:18-21 quotes these verses because they so accurately portray the ministry of Jesus. It is not surprising that Prison Fellowship would emphasize the tender loving attributes of Christ. The Lord would have the authority to rule harshly and even crush us if he wanted to. But our God has a heart for the weak unlike the rulers of Isaiah's day who were most often ruthless conquerors and cared very little for

the hurting and the broken. Our God is described as Creator and Sustainer (Verse 5) which makes it even more impressive that he is gentle because he could easily do otherwise. I was doing a study on how often “new” is mentioned in the Bible. Literally verse 9 reads, “Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare...” So, sing a new song to the Lord (Verse 10). I love the picture drawn by Isaiah in these nine verses. Our God is great and can do all things but he chooses to respond with kindness. He is the definition of love; “love is patient and kind!” How does this messianic Advent Scripture touch your heart?

#### DAY 5 – Isaiah 61

For many of us, these are familiar words. They not only point to Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 but have been essential words and truth for us as a church. Previously, we had a large painting hanging on the wall in our church auditorium (4 of them to be exact) and one of them referenced Isaiah 61 as a Scriptural theme for us. So, these are keywords and represent how we want to conduct ourselves in ministry for Jesus, just like he did when he walked the earth. This also is one of the most positive messages in Isaiah. There are beautiful promises in Isaiah, but the whole chapter seldom shares hopeful words and promises. This chapter points to spiritual prosperity from start to finish. It really is Good News as the title of this chapter suggests. What aspect of good news gets your attention? I know this chapter is messianic, and thus a strong Advent reading for us, because one of the promises essentially says so, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” (Verse 8) The word everlasting is clearly promising a never-ending relationship with the Lord. Isaiah 54:10 highlights this truth: “For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then, my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you. The last thing Jesus told his disciples was “And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) The presence of the Lord brings spiritual prosperity and protection which will never end. The vision that excites me the most is the anticipation of God making me into an oak tree of righteousness. “In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his own glory.” (Verse 3) The mustard seed comes to mind as a small seed but grows into a large plant. Our beginnings in Christ may be small but God has a way of multiplying himself in us. And his kingdom has grown exponentially and will continue to do so until the appointed time and Christ brings all things under his authority and reign forever. There is much to highlight in this chapter. How has God spoken to you through it?

## WEEK 2

### DAY 1 – John 1:1-18

John raises the curtain on his Gospel with a stunning description of Jesus Christ as “the Word.” This is the Greek word, “logos.” Both Greek and Jewish listeners in the first century would immediately recognize the profound meaning of this title. Greeks would have thought of the primary forces that sustain the universe. Jewish minds would have thought back to God creating the world with his word (Genesis 1). The identification of the Word is clearly presented in verse 14, as the Word who became flesh (human like us). Along with that profound revelation is the equality of the Word and God. This means Jesus shares the same essence as God: The Son existed before time, and he was the agent of all creation. These statements are meant to portray Jesus as the One and Only equal to God. John the Baptist’s ministry is also highlighted as the one announcing the significance of Christ. But the overarching message is the long-awaited One is here and is bringing hope to a dark world. You have heard the word “incarnation,” I’m sure. The strongest statement in the Bible about incarnation (in flesh) is verse 14. This leads us to an understanding of Jesus who is fully God and fully man; 100% both divine and human. Many have erred on one side or the other about the identity of Jesus. John begins with a strong presentation on the divinity of Jesus. But verse 14 tells us that Jesus became one of us and “pitched his tent” among us. We must believe both; it is the bedrock of our faith. But I would add a personal note that the humanity of Jesus brings faith alive for me. What he is, becomes what I may participate in through his Spirit. His true humanity makes companionship with him so close. When I say, “I love the Lord Jesus,” it is deep and intimate. How does this profound chapter draw you closer to Christ?

### DAY 2 – Matthew 1

You can’t miss the genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel. It creates a connection to the past and certainty of who Jesus was and is. Matthew’s emphasis surely was meant to highlight the ancestry of Jesus running from Abraham through David. Sometimes his genealogy is criticized because some people are missing and others that have been included seem out of place. For example, the four women mentioned. And not only that they were women, but they each had a stained reputation, to say the least. However, the faith of these women was exemplary in spite of their sorted backgrounds. They each highlight the grace of God to redeem even those who seem unworthy by others. Lectio 365 is highlighting the voice of these women this week. If interested you can read about Tamar in Genesis 38:24-27; Rahab’s story is in Joshua 2; Ruth has a Book named after her and the suggested reading is Ruth 3:1-6; Bathsheba is introduced in 2 Samuel 11:1-5. The strongest evidence of Jesus being the Messiah is not this genealogy because others could be possible candidates. The Old Testament prophecies become the clearest picture of Jesus and how he fulfilled each one. Isaiah 7:14 is quoted in verse 23. Matthew purposefully quotes this verse because he believed that Isaiah was foreshadowing the birth of Jesus through the Virgin Mary. Matthew gives more attention to Joseph as the male descent was especially important to the Jewish mindset. The genealogy runs through Joseph and his encounter with an angel in verse 20 becomes a key event in the narrative. Later this week we will read about the significance of Mary but today Joseph plays the role of heir to Abraham in verse 16. How does Matthew’s birth account speak to you today?

## DAY 3 – Matthew 2

Even as we read about the guiding star and the devotion of the Magi, the story of Herod reminds us that abuse and oppression stained the beauty of Christ's entry into our world. "A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." (Numbers 24:17) This was understood by Jews to point to a messianic deliverer. The star is definitely a point of inspiration and fascination with God's governance over nature. Plus, don't you love the addition of the Magi in Christ's birth?! The Magi are some unlikely characters because they lived so far from Bethlehem and they were connected to some questionable practices. They might be tied to astrology, the interpretation of dreams, the study of sacred writings, the pursuit of wisdom, and even magic. But I would take the heart of these men 100% of the time compared to Herod. Don't you hate it when the bad guys get all the attention?! Herod earned the title "the Great" because of his reputation as a great builder. But his accomplishments are outweighed by his brutal life and arrogance. He had family troubles and eliminated anything or anyone who posed a threat to his throne. He murdered two of his wives and three of his own sons when he suspected them of plotting against him. But he also knew how to manipulate people. He built the temple making it one of the most magnificent buildings in the ancient world. Thank God that the Magi were warned about Herod's intentions. The Magi probably saw through his false interest to worship the newborn king. Recently, I was teaching about the certainty of Christ's second coming. The new earth under the rule of our Savior Jesus will be one of harmony and joy unending. There will be no oppressive rulers or underlying evil that creates fear and uncertainty. The "Herods" of this world will be forever punished and separated from the kingdom of our God. Advent reminds us that Christ's first coming was predicted and fulfilled according to God's purpose and plan. So too, Christ's second coming will usher in the beauty of Eden and the everlasting love of God which will permeate the very air we breathe. I encourage you to pray for Christ's return, "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!"

## DAY 4 – Luke 1 (yes, all 80 verses!)

Obviously, there's a lot in this chapter but for whatever reason, the composers of Bible divisions believed that these 80 verses should all be included in the first introductory chapter about Jesus and his amazing life. This means we should read it that way. Read it through as it flows and then reread it being sensitive to what the Holy Spirit might want you to contemplate. I have thought about the connection between Gabriel and Mary because I shared a sermon on it. I also spent time thinking about Mary's Song which is a helpful example of praise and prayer for me. I have read through Zechariah's prophetic words of praise also. I see a theme in this chapter that is so important to our relationship with the Lord. Mary, Elizabeth, and even Zechariah respond to the goodness of the Lord with praise and rejoicing. This is actually a repeated emphasis for Luke as recipients of God's grace praise him for his wonderful deeds (1:44, 46, 64, 68; 2:13, 38; 5:25-26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15-18; 19:37; 24:53). Luke continues this theme in the Book of Acts as we know from our 5 weeks in Acts. One of Tyler's messages during Advent highlighted "joy." The coming of Jesus and his ministry often caused joy and rejoicing. This came to a crescendo on Palm Sunday as his followers shouted, "praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen" (19:37). It is my observation that we struggle to release our praise to the Lord in prayer. We will sing along on Sunday mornings but worshipping our Lord in prayer privately or with our prayer group is rare. Why don't we respond with thanksgiving and praise more freely? Mary and Zechariah

focused on what God had done and who he is more than anything else. They let that be the focus of their prayer. The prayers of the Bible feature praise and rejoicing more than any other aspect of prayer. How might you move in that direction more so? Try a prayer of praise for 10 minutes with no other purpose. I think you will be surprised at how it ministers to you.

#### DAY 5 – Luke 2

This is the most famous text for Christ's birth. Many of you might even read it on Christmas day to those you are with. There's no doubt about the inspiration that it causes. We love it, right? The visitation of the angels was our focus on Sunday and the promise was peace from above. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and told his disciples he came to bring them peace. Peace is a marvelous gift that can be received by faith, faith in Jesus. But the part of the story that has caused me a moment of pause has to do with Mary. The last thing we read about in this chapter is Jesus in the temple as a 12-year-old. It is easy to identify with Mary and Joseph if you have been a parent. Three days missing Jesus would seem like an eternity. But do you notice what I notice in Mary? In chapter 1 she is an example of faith and rejoices freely for God's grace in her life. Then at the birth, the shepherds visit the stable where Jesus is born and she kept all of these things and pondered them in her heart. She affirms the identity and mission of Jesus her son even as Simeon and Anna say such profound and marvelous things about him. Her heart is aglow with faith and revelation. She has an inside track on what God has planned for her son. But by the end of the chapter, Jesus is one of the many children on the trip. He is almost forgotten until they realize he isn't with the group. "Son," his mother said to him, "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere." (Verse 48) The inspiration of being the mother of Jesus might have worn off some. Life was filled with routine. Mary most likely had other children by the time Jesus was 12. Her spiritual sensitivities had waned so that the things above became secondary and the challenges of life were primary. I know I am reading between the lines with Mary but I am sure this happens to us. The Apostle Paul said, "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth." (Colossians 3:1-2) I am not sure Mary was thinking only of the things of earth but I do sense that she had lost the vision of who Jesus is in our story. If you want your spiritual fervor to burn brighter you will need a clear vision of Jesus and his Lordship. May this Christmas be a renewal of your love for Jesus. Merry Christmas!