

East White Oak Bible Church

Advent 2016

Jesus Christ, the answer for mankind's identity crisis.

#IDENTITYCHRIST

INTRODUCTION

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:8-13

What an exciting time of year. This time of year is spent in anticipation of family, gifts, Christmas songs, snow, food, and a sense of peace on earth. For those who are believers, this time of year holds a special place in our hearts. For this is when we reflect on the greatest story ever told. When some 2,000 years ago a tiny baby was born who would save mankind from their penalty of sin.

Our culture tries hard to distract us from the real meaning of this Christmas season. While the time with family and friends is so wonderful, it must not overshadow what made this a joyous celebration. The world around us tries to promise us things that will fill the void in our hearts. But the truth is, the only promise that fills that void is that God sent His Son to pay for our sins and make an eternal relationship with Him possible.

HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

The word Advent has Latin roots, meaning "coming." Christians of earlier generations spoke of "the advent of our Lord" and of "His second advent." The first phrase refers to God's becoming incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The latter phrase speaks of Jesus' second coming. In a second sense "advent" designates a period before Christmas when Christians prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. This practice may have begun in some churches as early as the late fourth century. Advent began as a time of fasting. Sermons focused on the wonder of the Incarnation. By the Middle Ages, four Sundays had become the standard length of the Advent season.¹

There are a couple of ways people have celebrated the Advent season. One is through an Advent calendar that has some doors counting down to Christmas day. Often, behind these doors were poems, verses, and gifts that reflected the story of Jesus' birth. Another tradition is an Advent wreath. The wreath is made up of five candles that reflect Christ being the light of the world (Matt. 4:16; John 1:4-9, 8:12). As each week passes during Advent, a candle is lit leading up to the first advent, Christmas Day!

Advent is a wonderful time for us to take a break from our normal routine and reflect on the wonderful story of the first advent. Without this first advent, there would be no hope for mankind. So this season, we get to anticipate in a fresh way the coming of our Savior.

My prayer is that this guide will help you, your family or your small group see beyond the noise that this world offers and take a moment each week to reflect on Christ this Advent season.

Pastor Josh

¹ Grissom, F. A., & Bond, S. (2003). Advent. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 31). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

USING THE GUIDE

This guide offers you four weeks of material to help you and others reflect on Christ during this Advent season. Each week has seven sections in it. The first includes several passages that you will want to read through before you do anything else. Next, you will see a small section of questions that will help prepare you for the rest of the devotional. The devotional section is a short section to help you reflect on the theme for that week. Next, you have a reflection section. This section will guide you to think a little deeper into what you read in the Scripture section. Finally, you have an action, song, and activity section. Each of these sections will help you further reflect and put into action what you are focusing on for that week.

Many of us know the Christmas story well. But don't rush through these devotionals. Reflect on them and reread them throughout the week. Enjoy this fresh look during Advent season and enjoy the anticipation of the celebration of Jesus Christ!

SONGS AND PLAYLISTS

Each week there will be a few songs to help you reflect more on the emphasis for each given week. There is an Advent playlist available on our Advent website (ewoadvent.org). Enjoy the Advent season through song!

More info at: EWOADVENT.ORG

Week One

The Man, Adam

November 27 - December 3

WEEK ONE

- The Man, Adam -

“But I cannot tell that to this old sinner, and I cannot comfort him either; he has made himself unable to hear my voice. If I spoke to him, he would hear only growlings and roarings. Oh, Adam's son, how cleverly you defend yourself against all that might do you good!” ~Aslan
— C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*

Scripture Reading

Genesis 1-3

Devotional Thought

You may be wondering why on this first week of Advent, that you are reading about creation. Many of you may be asking, "What does this have to do with preparing my heart for Christmas?" May I encourage you with this; much of what we celebrate at Christmas is an answer to the questions brought up from these early moments in mankind's history. So for this and many other reasons, we begin at creation, we start at the moment when our identity crisis began.

Have you ever taken a moment to think through Adam's first job? God takes Adam (who is naked), sits him down and begins to parade all the newly created creatures in front of him. Adam's task is to name these creatures. This was man's first job. Here was this man, naked and content to name animals for the Creator. What made Adam sit there? For Adam, at this moment, there was nothing more fulfilling to him than overseeing anything for God.

We probably would laugh if this were the task given to us. But our smiles about this task quickly fade when we see the turn of humanity shortly after its completion. For what follows would impact the rest of mankind.

At the moment Adam (and Eve) sinned, identity became something mankind would grasp at anything for to find its meaning. As God walks through the garden, He calls out to Adam and Eve. They peek out from hiding, wearing sewn together fig leaves.

The first thing that God said was, "Who told you that you were naked?"

What an amazing verse, who told you that your identity is not found in Me? Who has deceived you, that you run from your source of contentment to wear simple leaves hiding your physical identity from Me and others? What has robbed you of your self-esteem, confidence and complete identity in Me?

From this moment on, mankind's self-fulfillment fell from identity in God (their Creator) to identity in what mankind does for himself.

I wish we could start this Advent season on a happier, more Christmas-like, way. But to understand the joy Christmas brings, we must first understand what led us to the need of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Take time to respond and think through what your identity is in.

Respond in Action

Where do you look for your identity? (relationships, career, education, looks, etc...) What makes you feel good, important, or worth something? Take a moment and write down the things that make you feel like you.

What is something you hope happens for you, your family, or your community this Advent season? How can you play a role in making this happen?

Pray that God will use this Advent season to help reveal to you where your identity lies.

Songs of the Advent

All the Heavens-Hillsong

We Fall Down-Chris Tomlin

Hope Is Dawning-Aaron Keyes

Activity

As a family, couple, small group, or individual create an Advent wreath or Advent calendar to help you reflect on what this time of year is about, the God who keeps His promises.

Kid's Corner

The Joy of Giving:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

Christmas is the time to celebrate the greatest gift the world has received, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! To help your family focus on being a great gift giver like our great God, encourage them to give unique gifts to those they encounter this Christmas season. Work as a family to give a gift to someone who needs to know of the gift of Christ. Some ideas include:

- Leave a small gift (cookies, candy, etc.) and a card for the postman, newspaper deliverer or garbage collector
- Make cards and take them to a local nursing home
- Write a note of thanks that also celebrates the joy of Christ at Christmas to your bus driver, librarian, grocery store clerk, hairdresser, etc.
- Write/make Christmas cards for some neighbors and deliver them

Week Two

The Battle for Identity

December 4 - December 10

WEEK TWO

- The Battle for Identity -

"Failure to deal with the presence of sin can often be traced back to spiritual amnesia – forgetting our new, true, real identity. As a believer, I am someone who has been delivered from the dominion of sin and who therefore is free and motivated to fight against the remnants of sin in my heart. You must know, rest in, think through, and act upon your new identity – you are in Christ"

Sinclair B. Ferguson

Scripture Reading

Romans 5:12-21

Ephesians 2:1-10

Think of a time when you have been excited to share good news with someone:

What made that message so special?

What made it special for the person(s) you were sharing it with?

Devotional Thought

What does the word Advent bring to mind? An advent calendar with boxes filled with cheap chocolate? Lighting special candles? Going to a special church service? What we need to know is that Advent is important and it is far more important than candles, presents, chocolate and all the crazy shopping!

The fact is, humanity has an identity crisis. Every culture is driven to find its identity. Often our culture finds its identity in things like labels, clothes, wealth, status, the cars we drive, the house we live in, our success, and on and on the list could go. This journey in finding our identity has turned Christmas into the consumer-crazed epidemic we experience today. Advent is to remind us that our identity is not found in our culture, but is found in Jesus, the Savior who came to save us from our identity crisis.

Advent must be centered around Jesus coming into history to redeem us for His glory. Take time to think through the Scripture reading this week and answer the reflection questions. Is this Jesus the one who guides you to your true identity?

Reflection

What do the Scripture readings tell us about Jesus?

Why did you give your life to Jesus?

How has Jesus changed your life?

How could your story be important to others?

Respond in Action

How can you share Christ with someone this Advent season? Choose at least one individual that you have a relationship with that you can share Christ with.

Pray that during this Advent season God will give you both opportunity and courage to share the hope of Advent with that individual.

Songs of the Advent

I Heard the Bells On Christmas Day-Casting Crowns

All This Glory-David Crowder

Joy Has Dawned-Keith & Kristyn Getty

Activity

As a family, couple, small group, or individual, purchase a gift(s) this week to donate to a local homeless shelter, local church ministry, Salvation Army, or Goodwill. Make sure to attach a note about the true message each of us should reflect on this Advent season.

Kid's Corner

Christmas in Other Countries:

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” Mark 16:15

Jesus was God's gift of grace and salvation from sins that was given to the WHOLE world. Remember this together as a family by reading about another country and doing an activity, craft or making a recipe from another nation. Wycliffe Kids has great ideas! While you are working, celebrating, and creating pray for the people of this nation to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Week Three

Living with a New Identity

December 11 – December 17

WEEK THREE

- Living with a New Identity -

"I would rather be what God chose to make me than the most glorious creature that I could think of; for to have been thought about, born in God's thought, and then made by God, is the dearest, grandest and most precious thing in all thinking."

— George MacDonald

Scripture Reading

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Think of your hero.

What about that person makes them your hero?

In our society, who are the heroes?

Devotional Thought

Growing up I wanted to be Batman. I grew up in the 80's with the 60's version of the Batman and Robin TV show. Yes, with all its "Pows" and "Shazam's!" What red-blooded boy didn't want to be like Batman? He had a sweet ride and all the cool gadgets a kid could ever want! Batman was my hero! As such, I dressed like him, talked like him, and imitated him in any way possible. Who we elevate as our hero, often becomes who we imitate.

Thessalonians is not usually where we turn for a traditional Christmas story, but what we find here is essential in understanding how Christmas celebrates the fulfillment of mankind being given a new identity (its original identity). Christ came not only to save mankind from sin but to also remind us and give us the power to become what God intended His precious creation to be. Paul says that believers are to be imitators of the Lord. To be an imitator of something means we have to know that thing we are trying to imitate. As a child of God, we are given the power

to become imitators of Christ. Are you taking the time to look into the mirror of Scripture to become more like Christ? Take time this week to go through the reflection questions as we are focusing on showing Christ to the world around us, especially during these last days leading to Christmas.

Reflection

Read *Galatians 5:16-24*.

What are the fruits of the Spirit?

Is there a fruit you excel at? Is there one you struggle in?

With the fruit you struggle with, where do find your weakness showing up most often?

What about Christ gives you hope? In your area of weakness, how can you instead imitate Christ?

Respond in Action

Our lives should be all about Jesus! What is a way you can show others your excitement about Jesus? Encourage your friends and family that love Jesus to share with others their excitement for what this Advent season is all about.

Pray that God will give you the opportunity to show your excitement of the real meaning of Christmas in the coming weeks.

Songs of the Advent

O Come O Come Emmanuel-David Crowder

Glory Be-Sojourn

My Soul Longs-The Neverclaim

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus-Chris Tomlin

Activity

As a family, couple, small group, or individual pick a few Christmas songs that you can sing together and visit a friend, neighbor, or family member who needs to be encouraged about what truly is exciting about this time of year.

Kid's Corner

Remember God's Christmas Blessings:

(<http://thecraftyclassroom.com/2015/12/17/nativity-finger-puppets/>)

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

Remembering all God has given to us during this Christmas season helps us to think about all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable! As a family, use finger puppets, a nativity set or dress up yourselves to show and share about God's goodness to us as described in the gospels. Grown-ups or older children can read the scriptures while other family members use the above-mentioned methods to act out the Christmas story.

Week Four

The Savior, Jesus

December 18 - December 24

WEEK FOUR

- The Savior, Jesus -

"If our identity is in our work, rather than Christ, success will go to our heads, and failure will go to our hearts."

Timothy Keller

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 7:10-14

Psalm 24

Romans 1:1-7

Devotional Thought

Our promised Savior has come, and it is by His grace that we can see Him for who He is and live a life that reflects Him well!

The love of God is seen through the coming of Jesus Christ. In Genesis 3 we saw sin enter the world and the promise was made that sin would be crushed. Jesus Christ was the sacrificial lamb who would crush the serpent's head and defeat sin for good. What an amazing thing to know sin can be forgiven and a relationship can be had with God. No longer is our identity found in Adam; it is found in Christ!

Jesus left to be seated with His Father, but He is alive and will once again return to collect His followers. For now, it is for those of us who are followers of Christ, the Church, to show and share the Gospel so that others may experience in our hope, joy, and excitement. He is coming again to finalize His war over sin. No longer is our identity in Adam but instead is found in Christ.

Reflection

Think about the life of Christ and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross on our behalf. What makes this so important to mankind? *If you don't know the answer to this, ask a pastor, friend, or family member that has a relationship with Jesus to share about salvation found through Jesus.*

Do you find it difficult to live out your faith? Why or why not?

What about this Advent season has helped encourage boldness in your faith?

Respond in Action

Who is someone that needs a last minute word of encouragement, a gift, or hug from you to show them that you care for them? Does this person need to hear about the Savior who loves them more than we ever could?

Pray that the reflection from this Advent season will push you further in your walk with God. Pray that this coming year will be the best spiritual year you have ever had! Your true identity is found in Christ; live that and share that this coming year!

Songs of the Advent

Light of the World-Matt Redman

How Great is Our God-Chris Tomlin (World Edition is great!)

Forever-Kari Jobe

Let Us Adore Him-Hillsong

O Holy Night-Shane and Shane

Activity

As a family, couple, small group, or individual spend time thinking through and writing down all the reasons to be thankful for those God has placed in your life that help point you to Jesus.

Kid's Corner

Share the Light of Jesus (<http://www.redtedart.com/gifts-kids-can-make-decorated-candles/>)

“Again Jesus spoke to them saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’” John 8:12

All the beautiful, twinkling Christmas lights point us to the true light of Christmas and of the entire world-Jesus Christ!

With your children, gather some inexpensive candles and some permanent markers (Bic Marking Permanent Markers work great!) and have them design a Christmas candle for friends and/or relatives to help spread the light of Jesus. You could attach a Christmas tract or card explaining salvation to share with your gift.

Christmas Day

The Celebration of His Identity

December 25

Christmas Day

- The Celebration of His Identity -

*“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”*
— C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

Scripture Reading

Romans 8:31-39

Devotional Thought-By Paul Trippⁱ

Why should you read this passage to your family on Christmas? Because Romans 8 reminds us what the Christmas story is all about, by defining the glorious result of the birth of Jesus.

What was the glorious result of Jesus' birth? In a word - love. Think about it: Jesus deserved to be loved, but he was rejected so that we, who deserve to be rejected, would be eternally loved by the Father.

Jesus subjected himself to the fickle and failing love of his followers so that we will know the faithful and unfailing love of the Father.

Jesus experienced separation from the Father so that nothing could ever separate us from the Father's love.

This Christmas, remind yourself and your family that hope is only found in how much you've been loved by Jesus. It will be tempting to look for hope in the gifts

that you receive or in the gifts that you give or in the people that you celebrate Christmas with, but those gifts will get old, your generosity will wrestle with your selfishness, and the people who say they love you will find a way to disappoint you once again.

The only hope that you have this Christmas is in the love that God has for you. Husbands, you won't love your wife like you're supposed to. Wives, you won't love your husbands like you're supposed to. Brothers and sisters, you won't love your siblings like you're supposed to. Parents, you won't love your kids like you're supposed to. Kids, you won't love your parents like you're supposed to. But God will always love you perfectly.

Christmas Day is a celebration of how much God loves us. Don't miss out on an opportunity to share that Good News. Remind yourself and your family to fix your eyes on Jesus and celebrate that there's eternal, life-changing hope for you!

Songs of the Advent

Joy To The World-Rend Collective
Go Tell It On the Mountain-Mercy Me
Christmas Day-Michael W. Smith
The Christmas Hope-NewSong
A Cradle Prayer-Rebecca St. James
All Is Well-Michael W. Smith
Noel-Lauren Daigle

ⁱ <http://www.paultripp.com/articles/posts/read-this-on-christmas-morning>