



The HOPE of Advent!

Intro Reading: *This week begins Advent, the season on the Christian calendar that prepares our hearts for the celebration of Christmas by focusing on four aspects of our walk with God: hope, joy, peace, and love. We do a lot of preparation for the holiday, but the most important is preparing our hearts to welcome Christ in a new way, and prepare our minds to understand the Incarnation with fresh insight!*

Group discussion starter:

- The service for the first Sunday of Advent focused on hope, including a video testimony and Pastor Tim's message from Luke about Zechariah and Elizabeth. What in the service inspired hope for you as we begin Advent?

A Hymn of Advent Expectation...

- In 1744, hymn writer Charles Wesley was reading the prophetic message of Haggai 2:4-7 as the Lord spoke hope to the leaders of Judah when they returned from exile to find the city and Temple of Jerusalem in ruins. Wesley thought about the many orphans in Industrial Britain and considered the economic hardships in the society around him. He wrote "**Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus**" with the intent to remind believers that Advent and Christmas commemorate the Nativity of Jesus and also to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ when true justice and mercy will reign.
- Wesley was also inspired by 17th-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal's statement, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator." His hymn serves as a Christian response to Enlightenment philosophy which proposed the notion of morality and social change separate from the heart change that Christian faith offers. His song captures the longing of Israel 2,000 years ago for the promised Messiah to appear, and of God's people today for His Return...

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus by Charles Wesley

Verse 1

Come Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart

Verse 2

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious Kingdom bring
By Thine own eternal Spirit, rule in all our hearts alone
By Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne

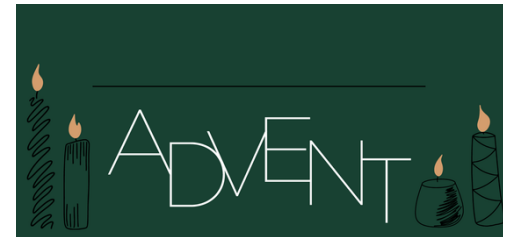
- Although almost 300 years old, what ideas in this hymn resonate with you today? Do you think the Church still longs for Jesus' Return, fears it, or perhaps misunderstands it?

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-10 - Training for Hope

- **Discussion:** In this passage, Paul encourages Timothy that Christian hope is not just a feeling or longing, but can be developed in our lives through "training in Godliness". What do you think Paul means - what "training" strengthens our hope?

Read 2 Peter 3:8-9 & 13 - Waiting with Hope & Patience

- **Discussion:** Peter answers believers who wondered why Jesus wasn't returning and had begun to lose hope in a difficult season. Peter reframes their thinking - why does he say Jesus hasn't returned yet? What is the hope for believers to look forward to?



Spiritual Health in Practice

Christians sometimes wonder what to do with the figure of Santa Claus, or what to tell their children. On the Christian calendar, December 6 is St. Nicholas' Day - do a Google search or check Wikipedia to research the real St. Nick, then discuss ways to honor his life and ministry this week!

Advent Prayers

Pray for one another - any specific stresses or concerns you have in this season? Any grief or loss you are carrying? Pray also that we can share our hope in Christ in this season!

