

The Advent Mission

SESSION 1

Reasons for the Seasons (Hope)

Advent = “the arrival of a notable person or event”

Mission = “a sending to go perform a specific duty”

For example - in the creation story, humanity was given a specific mission: to walk with God and tend to creation. (Gen. 1:28-30, 3:8).

The Advent Mission - then is the arrival of a notable person (Jesus) to perform a specific task/duty (salvation of the world).

Jesus Himself said it this way: (God’s Advent Mission Statement)

John 3:16 NLT

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (See note below)¹

By the Way -

How do we know these words of Jesus? Jesus said these words to Nicodemus the Pharisee during a private night time visit (see John 3:1-21). No one else was present with them, at least scripture does not indicate that anyone else was present. So the only way we can know these words 2,000 years later is for Nicodemus to have shared them with early Christians so that they might be recorded here by John the Apostle.

Tradition suggests that Nicodemus became a Christian, was kicked out of the Sanhedrin and died a martyr’s death some time later.

¹ Eerdman’s Dictionary of the Bible. 2000. pg. 963

The Advent Season - is not just a countdown to Christmas as we often consider it. In fact, the first three weeks of Advent has nothing to do with Christmas or the coming of the Christ child.

- The first three weeks are all about the 2nd coming of Christ, the “Parousia” (Gk. *arrival, to be present*). Texts such as - Matt. 24:36-44, 1 Thess. 3:9-13, 2 Pet. 3:8-15a, Jas. 5:7-10 are applicable.

36 “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

37 “When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah’s day. **38** In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. **39** People didn’t realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes... (Matt. 24:36-39 NLT)

- Not until the final week of Advent do we see Christmas themes brought forth. Texts such as - Isa. 7:10-16, Mic. 5:2-5a, Matt. 1:18-25 and Luke 1:39-45 become important.

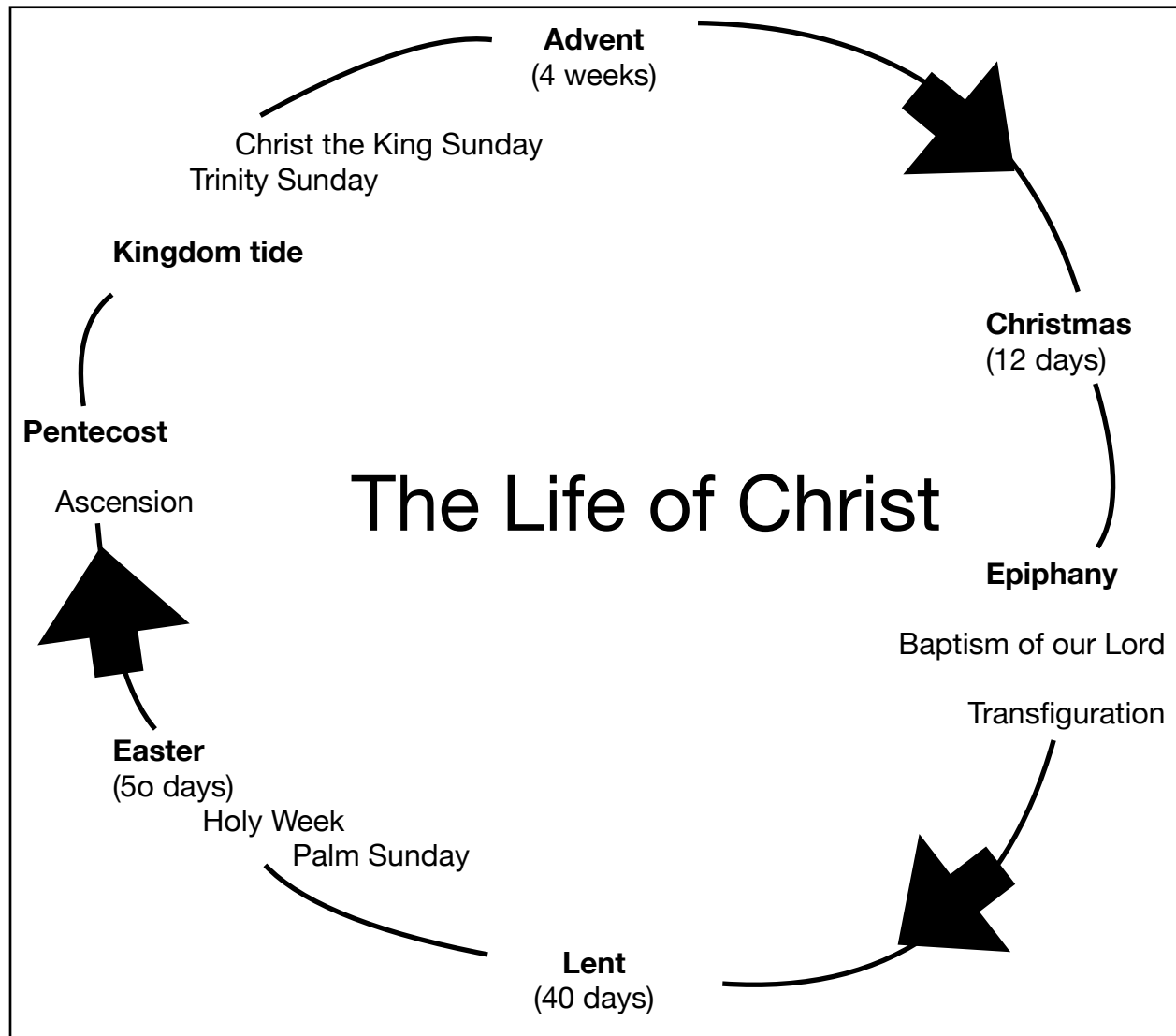
2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf. **3** The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the woman in labor gives birth. (Mic. 5:2-3 NLT)

- Advent is actually the beginning of the church liturgical calendar. So it is really our “Happy New Year” for the church. The calendar for the church revolves around the life of Jesus the Christ. (See Figure 1)

Text for the week: Hebrews 10:23-25 NLT

23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. **24** Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. **25** And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Figure 1. Liturgical Calendar



Therefore, the church liturgical calendar revolves around the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Christ.

See The Seedbed Daily Text Devotional:
Introduction and Day 1, pages ix - 3.

Questions:

1 What holiday or season of the year is your favorite or least favorite? Consider answers like: hunting, sports, family vacations, fiscal year, tax season, summer, back-to-school, etc. Which one weighs heaviest or impacts your family the most? How? Have you ever considered making the Christian

calendar (or “church calendar,” or “liturgical calendar”) your primary measurement of time and space? How might this change your life rhythm?

2 The Bible itself doesn’t explicitly mention nor prescribe the season of Advent, but several themes are present in Scripture that encourage us to observe the season: a deep anticipation for God to redeem the entire world (Isaiah 7:14; 2:2–4); a longing for God’s justice (Amos 5:24); John the Baptist’s proclamation of the coming Messiah (Mark 1:1–7); the expected return of Jesus to consummate his kingdom (Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; James 5:7–8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28). Select some of these passages and discuss how they relate to Advent.

3 Revisit today’s Scripture reading from Hebrews 10:23–25. How might the season leading up to Christmas look different if everyone were to observe it in light of: “the day of his return is drawing near” (v. 25)?

The Advent Mission

SESSION 2

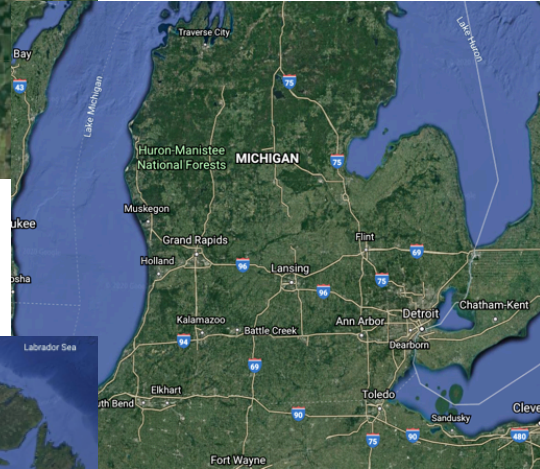
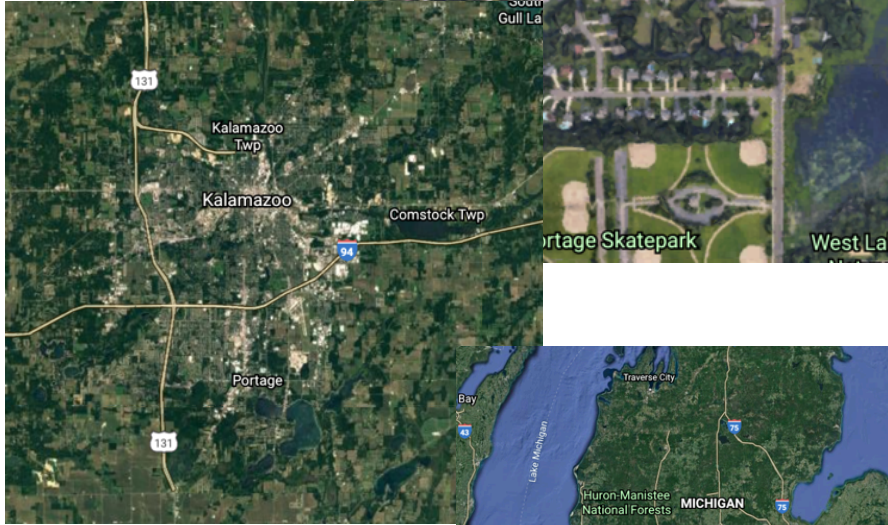
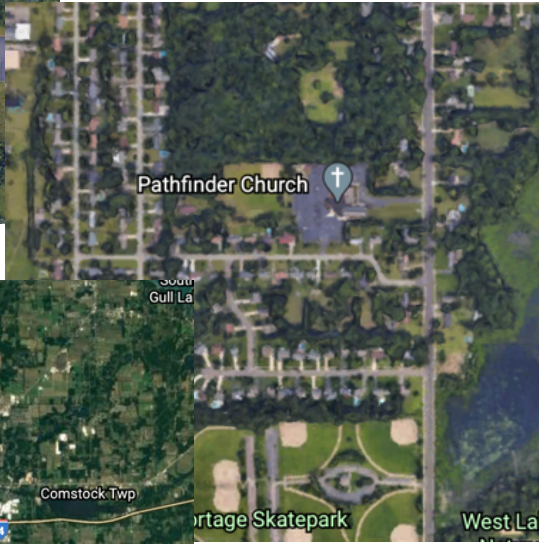
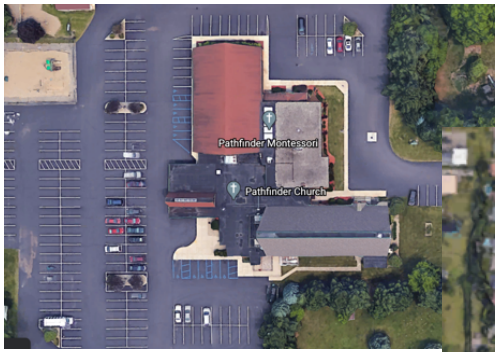
Google Earth View of the Story (Way)



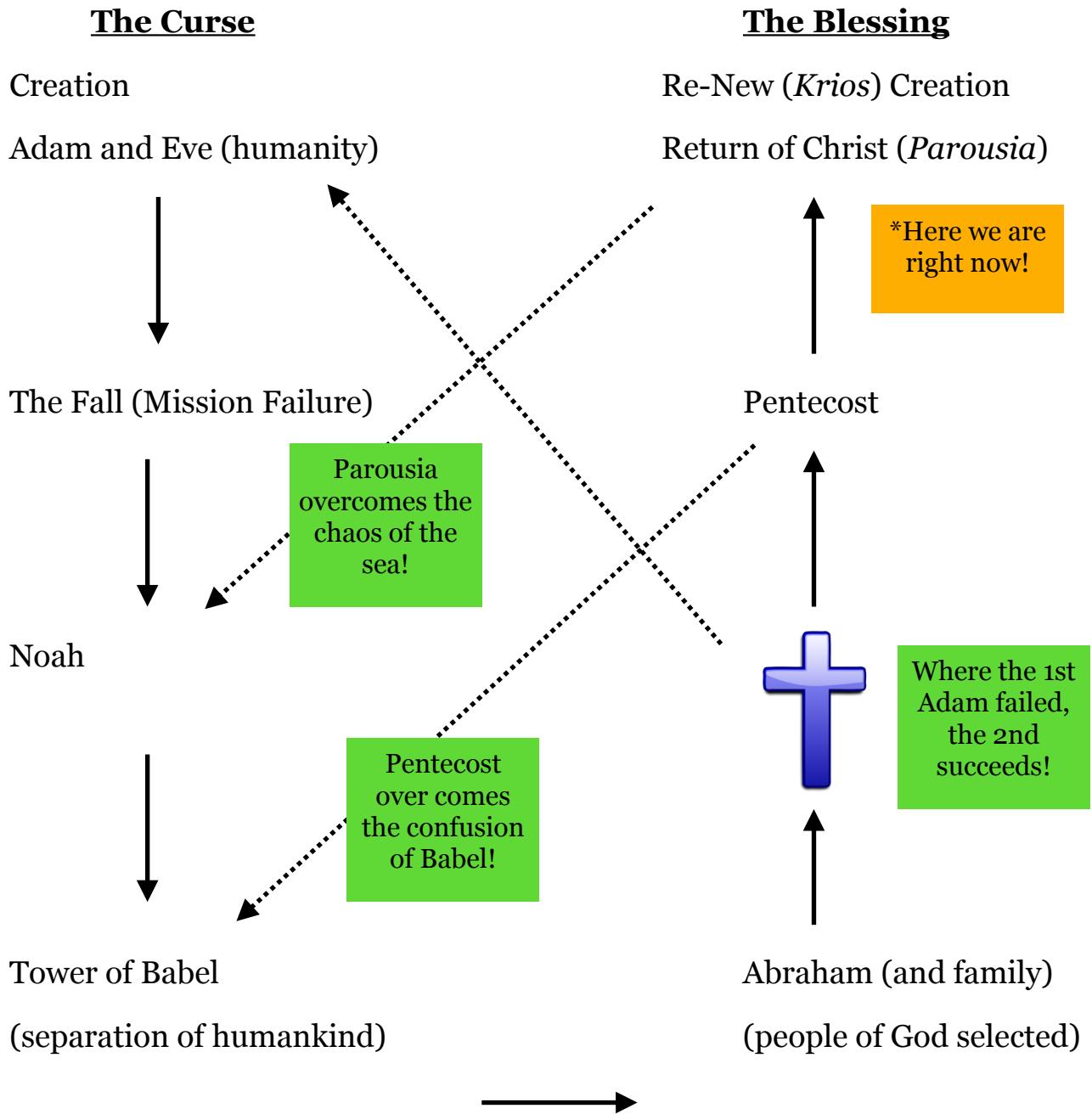
First pictures of Earth taken from space during the Apollo 8 mission in space.

This was the first view of the Earth we had ever seen from this high of a perspective. Sometimes we narrow in to close to a situation and must step back out and look from a higher one.

Christmas/Advent can often be focused down to the Nativity scene; but, we need to see Advent from a higher (cosmic) perspective to truly understand its significance.



God's Advent Mission from a Cosmic Perspective:



See The Seedbed Daily Text Devotional:
Day 15.

God's Mission Statement - John 3:16 NLT (1st half of the Gospel)

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Text for the Week: ISAIAH 60:18–22

Violence will disappear from your land;
the desolation and destruction of war will end.

Salvation will surround you like city walls,
and praise will be on the lips of all who enter there.

“No longer will you need the sun to shine by day,
nor the moon to give its light by night,

for the Lord your God will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

Your sun will never set;
your moon will not go down.

For the Lord will be your everlasting light.
Your days of mourning will come to an end.

All your people will be righteous.
They will possess their land forever,

for I will plant them there with my own hands
in order to bring myself glory.

The smallest family will become a thousand people,
and the tiniest group will become a mighty nation.
At the right time, I, the Lord, will make it happen.”

Questions:

1 Are you excited about Jesus’ return to our world? What makes you hesitate? What kind of life-markers or continued ambitions do you have with which you fear his return would interfere?

2 Have you ever noticed the parallels between some of the Old Testament events and the New Testament corollaries? Consider Noah’s flood (Genesis 6–9) and its parallel to Jesus’ return and the absence of seas (Revelation 21:1; as a side note: ancients considered large bodies of water to represent death and chaos). See also the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) and Pentecost (Acts 2). What is reversed there? Finally, consider that the book of Revelation ends with God’s kingdom coming down from heaven to earth (21:1–4). Does this

challenge your understanding of the Christian afterlife in any way?

3 Read the words to the hymn, “Joy to the World” together and after each stanza, share how the proper context of this hymn (Jesus’ second coming) changes your understanding of it.

4 Do you tend to view Christian salvation as a rescue mission away from our world (disembodied souls; heaven), or a rescue mission of our entire created order, as the Bible consistently describes it? Are you engaging in God’s mission meaningfully, or merely relieved that you’ve been saved, personally?

Advent Hymn: Joy to the World (UMH #246)

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

2. Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

4. He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, and wonders of his love.

Isaac Watts 1719

The Advent Mission

SESSION 3

Reorientation (Joy)



1202 Alarm = you are trying to do too much and I am going to have to shut down!

Reorientation:

Repent ~ *teshuva* (Heb), *metanoia* (Gk) = go back by the way you came, to turn 180 degrees from something (sin) toward another (Jesus).

Reorientation

= Return

= Repent

= Rest

Why do we need to repent? Because of Mission Failure on our part...



Saturn V rocket of Apollo Mission

God's Mission Statement - John 3:16 NLT (1st half of the Gospel)

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Text for the Week: Luke 1:39-47

39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town 40 where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. 41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. 43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? 44 When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”

46 Mary responded,

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

Questions:

1 How far back do you welcome Christmas music out in public spaces and retail stores? Advent has traditionally been a season of fasting and penitence, closer in mood to Lent than Christmas. Does this surprise you? How might find this challenge our consumer holiday culture, which is seemingly stretching further back into months leading up to December? How does it challenge you?

2 Repentance is not merely a feeling of sorrow or even a change in behavior. Repentance means turning away from sin and toward God, who alone can sustain the repentant heart with true life transformation. This is expressed sharply in Jesus' story about the person freed from unclean spirits who does not fill himself with something in their stead, and the results are worse than before (see Matthew 12:43–45). When the Old Testament prophets called Israel to repentance, they expressed God's chief desire that they would return to him (see Amos 4:4, 8–11; Hosea 3:5). Read Ephesians 5:18. What is God's answer to our moral and spiritual need? What (who) does he give us? Do you regularly seek the filling of the Spirit?

Matthew 12:43-45 NLT

43 “When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. **44** Then it says, ‘I will return to the person I came from.’ So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. **45** Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation.”

Hosea 3:5 NLT

5 But afterward the people will return and devote themselves to the Lord their God and to David’s descendant, their king. In the last days, they will tremble in awe of the Lord and of his goodness.

Ephesians 5:18 NLT

18 Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit,

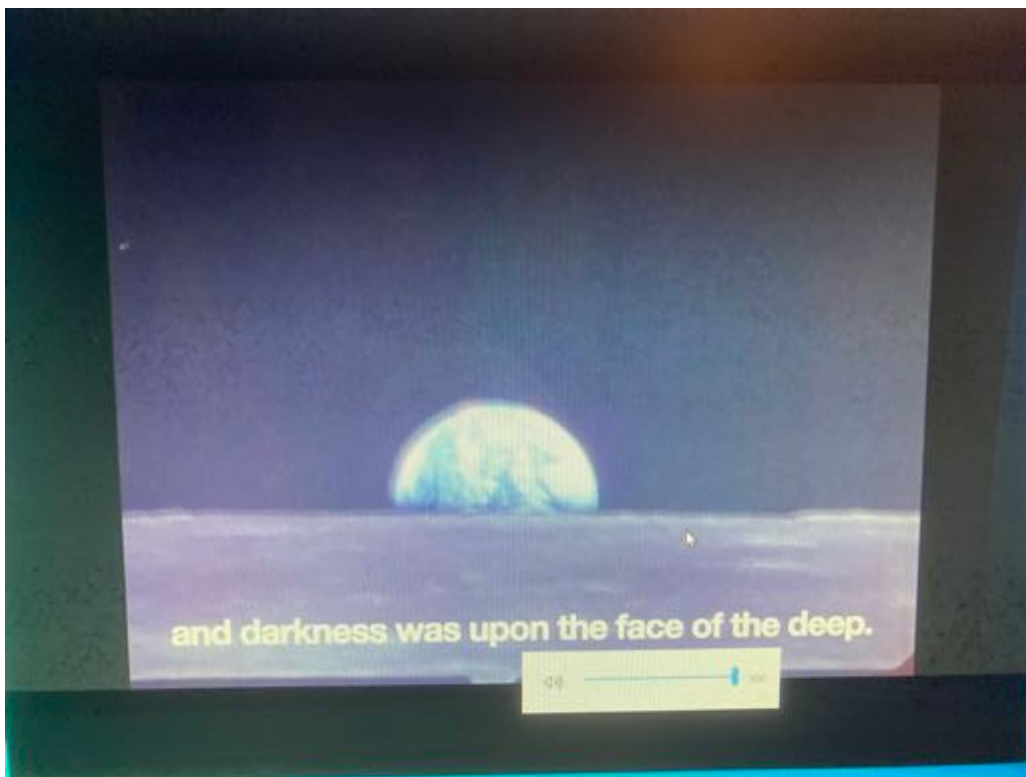
3 Read Luke 1:39–47 again and focus on, “Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?” Does the return of Jesus make you anxious at all when you consider your standing before God? Is there any behavior, pattern, or attitude that you especially exhibit during the holiday season from which God might be calling you to repent? Share as you’re comfortable.

The Advent Mission

SESSION 4

All Things (Peace)

Apollo 8 Broadcast in 1968:



1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

6 Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." **7** And that is what

happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. **8** God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

9 Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. **10** God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. **11** Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. **12** The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

God’s Mission Statement - John 3:16 NLT (1st half of the Gospel)

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Text for the Week: Colossians 1:19-20 NLT

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled every- thing to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.

Questions:

1 Are you anxious about anything in the future? What ranks high on your worry list (e. g., political outcomes, keeping your job, paying for your children’s education, the safety of your children, the health of someone you care about, making the credit card payments, your investments etc.) and have you ever considered explicitly asking that God give you his peace with respect to these matters? What would change about you (consider your thinking, your behavior)?

2 Jesus experienced the worst consequences of our sin and fallen creation in order that we may receive the best blessings of God’s promises. Consider the verses from Colossians 1. How did Jesus make peace between God and all of creation? (his blood, or his life/death). What promises has God made to his children living under the new covenant? (Consider John 8:36; John 14:13–16;

Philippians 4:6–7; Philippians 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24; Hebrews 13:5; James 4:7; James 1:5; and Revelation 3:5.)

John 8:36 NLT

36 So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.

Phil. 4:4-7 NLT

4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! **5** Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7** Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

James 4:7 NLT

7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

3 Shalom, or peace, is one of the outcomes of God's saving grace. According to the Bible, there are at least four dimensions to the peace given us in Jesus Christ: peace with God (resulting in communion), peace with others (resulting in reconciliation), peace with ourselves (resulting in wholeness), and peace with creation (resulting in harmony). Which of these do you tend to neglect? Would your life look any different if you started living, in the here and now, according to the pattern of these perfect outcomes when Jesus returns? This is what it means to live with the future in mind, or to live "from the future."

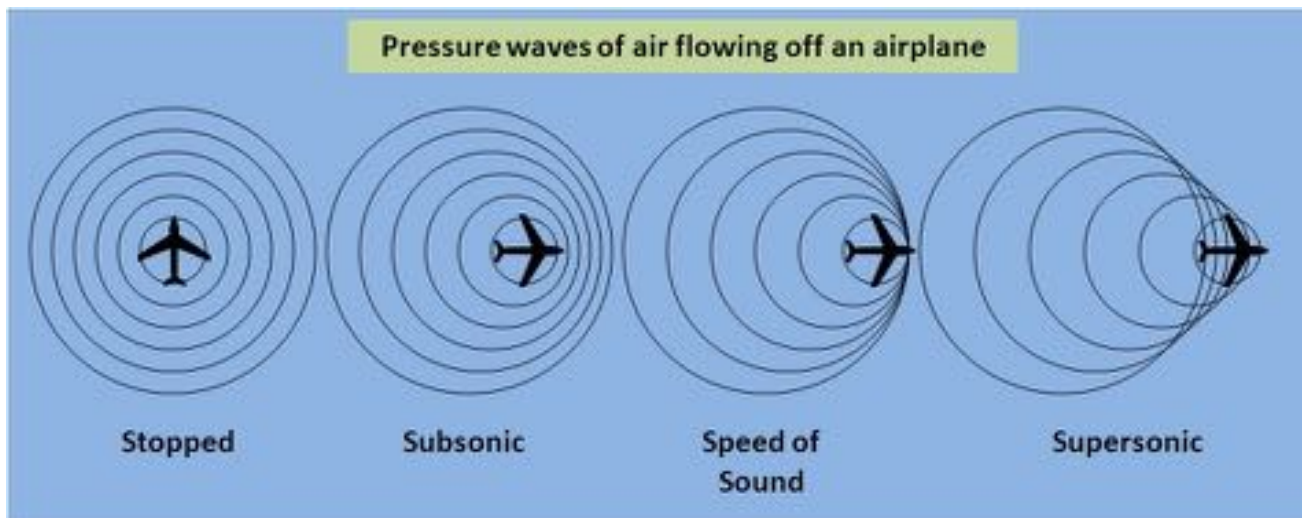
The Advent Mission

SESSION 5

Still Christmas

Merry Christmas, are you enjoying the ride? There are 12 days of Christmas, we are not done yet...

Speed of Sound = Mar 23, 2018 — If we consider the atmosphere on a standard day at sea level static conditions, the **speed of sound** is about 761 mph, or 1100 feet/second. (NASA)²



Once the rocket broke the speed of sound, the noise from the engines could no longer catch up to the capsule. So things became very quiet and the astronauts could enjoy the ride.

When all the noise of Christmas is over, we can enjoy the season. But, it is still Christmas!!!

God's Mission Statement - John 3:16 NLT (1st half of the Gospel)

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

² <https://www.grc.nasa.gov/www/k-12/airplane/sound.html>

Our Mission Statement in Response - 1 John 3:16 NLT (2nd half of the Gospel)

16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Text for the Week: Phil. 2:5-11 NLT

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.
6 Though he was God,
 he did not think of equality with God
 as something to cling to.
7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
 he took the humble position of a slave
 and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
8 he humbled himself in obedience to God
 and died a criminal's death on a cross.
9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
 and gave him the name above all other names,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Questions:

1 Philippians 2:5–11 is one of the most important passages in all of Scripture because it unequivocally identifies Jesus as divine and coequal with God the Father. We often turn to this verse for help in identifying Jesus as the Son of God. However, we often miss the first verse. Why is Paul sharing this theological truth? “You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” The theological truth is connected to the moral imperative. How does this attitude of Christ, lowering himself in the ultimate humility, compare with our own inherited cultural virtues? How can this attitude be exercised by Christians?

2 Share some of your own past New Year's resolutions. What worked? What didn't? How did you measure it? While resolutions focus on behavior, the gospel provides us with a new nature. Rather than being about dos and don'ts, the gospel is about who Jesus is and how his work affects our own nature. Consult Romans 6:6; Ephesians

4:22–24; Colossians 3:9–10. Do these passages challenge your understanding of what happens when Christians first believe? Are Christians “just forgiven,” as some bumper stickers claim?

3 Ask what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a Christian. Work through the following list (as time allows), consulting the passages together in order to determine specific works of the Holy Spirit, then discuss any new insights. Does the picture painted here reflect one of constant defeat, or progressive victory by the grace of God?

- The Spirit seals us (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30)
- The Spirit assures us we are God’s children (Romans 8:15–16; Galatians 4:6; see also 1 John 3:24; 4:13)
- The Spirit is gradually transforming us into the image of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18)
- The Spirit convicts us about sin (John 16:8)
- The Spirit produces fruit in us (Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 5:9)
- The Spirit encourages us (John 14–16)
- The Spirit helps us (Romans 8:26; Philippians 1:19)
- The Spirit assists us in prayer (Romans 8:26–27; Ephesians 6:18)
- The Spirit creates and produces unity (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:3–4)
- The Spirit strengthens our soul and spirit (Ephesians 3:16)
- The Spirit is building us into the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:22)
- The Spirit facilitates our access to the Father through Christ (Ephesians 2:18)
- The Spirit leads us in the way of grace (Galatians 5:5, 18)
- The Spirit helps us resist our flesh (Galatians 5:17)
- The Spirit brings freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17)
- The Spirit gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4–11)

The transformative power of God in the lives of Christians and churches will impact the gospel’s reception in the world.

The Advent Mission

SESSION 6

Your Crew (Epiphany)



Magi ~ astrologers that looked to the stars for what would happen in this world...

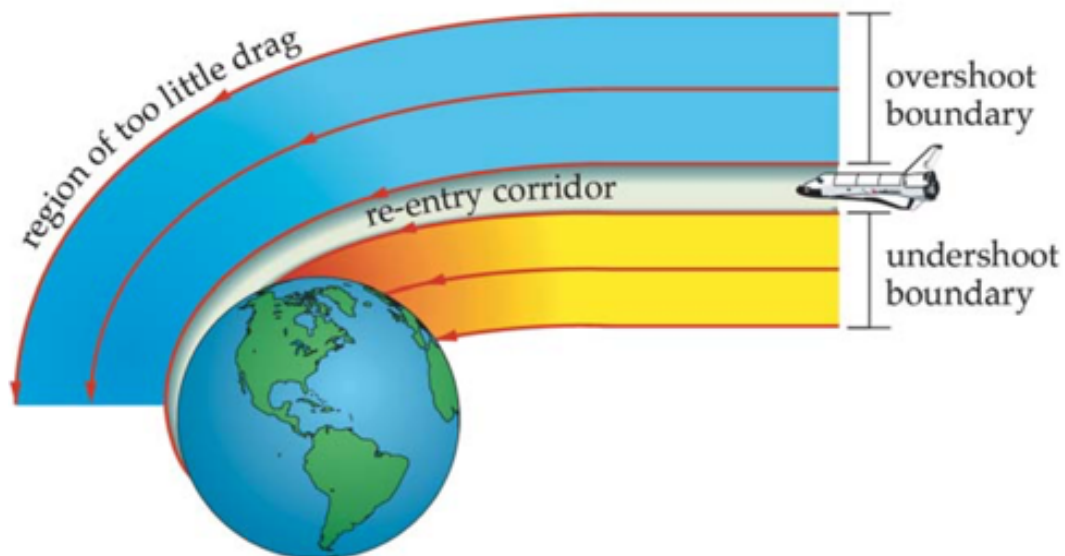


Figure 4.1.7-2. Re-entry Corridor. The re-entry corridor is a narrow region in space that a re-entering vehicle must fly through. If the vehicle strays above the corridor, it may skip out.

Matthew 7:13

“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the **narrow** gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that **way**.

God’s Mission Statement - John 3:16 NLT (1st half of the Gospel)

16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Our Mission Statement in Response - 1 John 3:16 NLT (2nd half of the Gospel)

16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Text for the Week: Psalm 19:1-4 NLT

- 1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.
 - 2 Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
 - 3 They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.[a]
 - 4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.
- God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

Questions:

1 The apostle Paul uses the term “epiphany” to describe both Jesus’ manifestation of God at his birth and his second coming in 2 Timothy 1:9–10, Titus 2:13, and 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Read these passages together. The church’s mission is to make visible (manifest) he that is invisible between these two bookend events.

2 Timothy 1:9-10 NLT

9 For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. **10** And now he has made all of this plain to us by the **appearing** of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.

Titus 2:13 NLT

13 while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be **revealed**.

2 Thess. 2:8 NLT

8 Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, but the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by the splendor of his **coming**.

How can Christians make Jesus Christ visible as individuals? How can the church make him visible as a community? Can one exist without the other?

2 One of the ways in which our trajectory can be aligned with Jesus is by engaging in a powerful small group practice known as bands. Are there people in your life outside of your family who know you intimately—both in your successes and struggles? Which of the following questions are easiest (and most difficult) for you to answer, and what steps might God be wanting you to take in order to practice this vulnerability with others?

1. How is it with your **soul**?
2. What are your **struggles** and successes?
3. How might the **Spirit** and Scriptures be speaking in your life?
4. Do you have any **sin** that you want to confess?
5. Are there any **secrets** or hidden things you would like to share?

3 Epiphany is the time on the Christian calendar that celebrates the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the world. Our calling is to make Jesus known. Read John 1:35–39. Here Jesus says, “Come and see.” Now read Mark 16:14–16. Here Jesus says, “Go and tell.” Is your life making him known, or is it more likely concealing him, or confusing his identity to others? What is easier for you to practice, a “come and see” lifestyle, or a “go and tell”? How might a discipleship band offer you a context to practice both of these commissions from Jesus?