Finding Jesus in the

WAITING

A Six-Week Community Advent Guide

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INTRODUCTION

There is no gospel without the Incarnation. However, it is increasingly hard to appreciate Christmas as a Christian. Remembering Jesus at Christmas requires us to set aside focused time, but most of our focused time is spent gift-buying and event-planning. How can we help our community to remember who and what we are celebrating?

The church has traditionally set aside time to prepare herself for Christmas with the season of Advent. **In the month leading up to Christmas, Advent invites us to reimagine what life was like before Christ.**

Over two millennia, the church has creatively engaged in all kinds of rituals to drive home the truth of Christmas in the heart of the faithful, from midnight mass to candlelight services. One of the oldest Christmas liturgies is the O Antiphons.

By the sixth century, the early church had developed a custom of reciting seven prayers together in the seven days before Christmas. These seven prayers call on Christ using seven titles or metaphors used of Him in the Old Testament. These metaphors reflect our deepest needs and longings. They are: O Wisdom, O Adonai ("Lord"), O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Morning Star, O King of Nations, O Immanuel.

Each prayer is just four lines, beginning with the title and ending with a call for Jesus to come. They're called antiphons because they are read "antiphonally," or opposite, Mary's Magnificat. Cool fact: in Latin, the poems form a backward acrostic which translates, "He comes tomorrow." It's also where the hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* comes from. Malcolm Guite describes the place of the O Antiphons in Advent:

> "The whole purpose of Advent is to be for a moment fully and consciously Before Christ. In that place of darkness and waiting, we look for his coming and do not presume too much that we already know or have it. Whoever compiled these prayers was able, imaginatively, to write 'BC', perhaps saying to themselves: 'If I hadn't heard of Christ, and didn't know the name of Jesus, I would still long for a savior. I would still need someone to come. Who would I need? I would need a gift of Wisdom, I would need a Light, a King, a Root, a Key, a Flame.' And poring over the pages of the Old Testament, they would find all these things promised in the coming of Christ. By calling on Christ using each of these seven gifts and prophecies we learn afresh the meaning of a perhaps too familiar name."[1]

Each week in this community Advent guide is centered on one metaphor for Christ from the Old Testament. We invite you to join us on this six-week journey, taking time to reflect on our need for Jesus this Advent season and anticipate the celebration of His arrival. **Maybe by extending Advent, we'll give our souls the extra space they need to truly prepare for Christmas. Won't you join us?**

—

[1] Quotes from Malcolm Guite in this resource are from his advent devotional, *Waiting on the Word: A poem a day for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany,* (Canterbury Press 2015).

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

As you gather with your community, we hope that you have space to:

- Connect with others through conversation.
- Connect with Christ through Scripture.
- Connect with God through prayer and receive hope.

Below is a basic guide through these three objectives. Feel free to adjust the length, format, or sequence as needed. We want Scripture and prayer to be a big part of each week, but we also want the time to be refreshing and relaxed.

1. CONNECT WITH OTHERS

After everyone arrives and has a chance to catch up, bring everyone into the same conversation with a reflection question, like: *What was a "high" and "low" from your week so far? What did you find yourself wishing for this week? If you could delete an hour from your week, which hour would it be? What superpower would have been most helpful to you recently? What about your life today would most surprise your ten-years-ago self?*

Transition with prayer, asking God to help us be fully present with Him and one another.

2. REFLECT: ANTIPHON + RELATED SCRIPTURES

During Advent, we will be working through the "O Antiphons" during our weekly gatherings. These are six liturgical poems, written by the early church for reading during Advent. Each one focuses on an Old Testament metaphor for the coming Messiah.

Read "Introduction" on page 2 during your first meeting together.

Have people volunteer to read from the guide, then use a few of the questions to guide your discussion. Feel free to adapt the questions based on your group, length of discussion time, etc.

3. PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

After discussing Scripture, spend time in prayer for one another. You can break up into smaller groups or share altogether. Use this prayer time as an opportunity to respond to and reflect upon the Scripture passages you just read, and anything that was stirred from the discussion questions, but also make space for individual requests.

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WEEK 1: "O WISDOM"

THE ANTIPHON

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

RELATED SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 9:6

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 11:2-3

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

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John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

A SONNET BY MALCOLM GUITE

I cannot think unless I have been thought,
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken.
I cannot teach except as I am taught,
Or break the bread except as I am broken.
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek, O Light within the light by which I see,
O Word beneath the words with which I speak, O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me, O Memory of time, reminding me,
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,
My Maker's Bounding Line, defining me,
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring, Come to me now, disguised as everything.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Any initial reflections?

2. Our culture places a lot of value in knowledge and expertise. What's the difference between the way our world values these things and how Scripture speaks of wisdom?

3. We all know we need wisdom. What does it mean, though, that Wisdom is a person? How does that change our understanding of wisdom? How does this change our understanding of Jesus?

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4. Advent is about three comings: Jesus' first arrival 2,000 years ago on Christmas; Jesus' arrival in our lives when we become Christians; and Jesus' second coming when He eradicates the presence of sin and renews the earth.

   – What are you thankful for from Jesus' arrival as *Wisdom* in His first coming?

   – How do you want to pray for Jesus to arrive as *Wisdom* in your life / our world today?

   – What will be great about Jesus' arrival as *Wisdom* in His final coming?

5. How can remembering Jesus' arrival as *Wisdom* shape our life together as a community?

6. How can remembering Jesus' arrival as *Wisdom* help us to live on mission and embody good news to our city this Advent?

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