

THE BIBLE, OUR BOOK OF ADVENTS

**ADVENT
SERMON SERIES**



AN ADVENT SERMON SERIES

PRESENTED BY
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**Concordia
Seminary**
ST. LOUIS

SAMPLE

THE BIBLE, OUR BOOK OF ADVENTS

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ADVENT WEEK 1

Born, Born, Born, to Living Hope!

Genesis 12:1-3; 18:1-15; John 8:48-58

ADVENT WEEK 2

“Surely the Lord Is in This Place”

Genesis 28:10-17; John 1:43-51

ADVENT WEEK 3

“I AM Has Sent Me to You”

Exodus 3:1-15; Deuteronomy 18:15

ADVENT WEEK 4

“The Goodly Land I See”

Joshua 1:1-6; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Hebrews 4:1-11

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

Forty-eight Advents after graduating from Seminary, traditional treatment of Advent themes seems trite. No question about these themes, Christ's incarnation, the Means of Grace, and Parousia, are of the essence of our Christian faith but their presentation has become, at least to me, well worn, "trite" from *tritus*, the participle of *terere*, to rub. True Advent challenges us, but there is much in our surrounding culture that subtly wears down messages of Christ's advents. One factor is omnipresent media and commerce that so focus society, parishioners included, on Christmas and gift giving that Advent gets reduced to getting ready to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus. Faithful people keep reminding us "Jesus is the reason for the season," true enough, but Jesus has other seasons, now and coming, which easily get drowned out by societal noise.

Another factor wearing down the impact of our Advent preaching is the compartmentalization of Western culture. In *The Bondage Breaker*, Neil T. Anderson says Western culture has a two-tier worldview: The transcendent world of God and spiritual forces (religion) and the empirical world of senses (science).¹ The majority world mingles the two, but Western culture keeps them separate. Hence, religion is compartmentalized to Sunday and church. So Christ's advent in the incarnation is past history, the Means of Grace compartmentalized to worship in church, and his final Advent is so far off, it's not relevant to daily life. These and other deceptions of our surrounding culture can make us become "atheists unawares," as Os Guinness puts it.

In short, the modern world quite literally "manages" without God. We can do so much so well by ourselves that there is no need for God, even in his church. Thus we modern people can be profoundly secular in the midst of explicitly religious activities. Which explains why so many modern Christian believers are atheists unawares. Professing to believe in supernatural realities, they are virtual atheists; whatever they say they believe, they show in practice that they function without practical recourse to the supernatural. ... The call to follow Jesus Christ runs directly counter to this deadly modern pressure toward secularization."²

In an obviously imperfect attempt to reenergize the traditional and true themes of Advent and to try to raise awareness of God's comings and saving presence in every day of life, I have turned to four familiar Old Testament texts as prefigurations of the advents of Christ. The Enlightenment beguiled us into studying Old Testament texts in their historical context, which is a true exegetical task, *sensus literalis*, but there is more than the original setting. The Scriptures being the Scriptures of the church, we also want to understand Old Testament texts in the light of Christ. *Novum testamentum in vetere latet; vetus testamentum in novo patet.*

¹ Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker: Overcoming Negative Thoughts, Irrational Feelings, Habitual Sins* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2019).
² Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 149.

Robert D. Preus: “Following Luther, the theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy make Christ the central theme of all Scripture. ... This conviction of all the orthodox Lutherans that the Christocentricity of Scripture is a hermeneutic principle dovetails perfectly with their belief that the theology of Scripture is one unified Christian theology, with their strong and consistent christological exegesis of the Old Testament, with their emphasis on the analogy of faith as a hermeneutical norm, and with their understanding that all Scripture is Law or Gospel. But what is of higher significance is that the Christocentricity of Scripture unites the formal (*sola Scriptura*) principle of theology with the material principle (justification through faith in Christ) in such a way that neither stands alone, but each complements the other perfectly. The Sacred Scriptures, which are the norm of doctrine, are the Scriptures that declare Christ throughout....

“To be sure, there is a vast difference between the Old and New Testament Scriptures in their presentation of doctrine; there is a definite unfolding and advance in clarity as well as phraseology and thought. The Old Testament Scriptures present the doctrine under different circumstances and different times; in the Old Testament Christ is prefigured under shadows and types as something to come. But substantially the theology of Scripture is one, even as Christ is one. *Tempora variata sunt, non fides.*”³

Martin Luther: “What Moses wrote concerning the patriarchs he did not write primarily for their sakes. They had no need at all of these writings; they were already dead and gathered to their fathers. No, Moses wrote in order that the churches might be instructed and strengthened up to the end of the world.”⁴

No effort has been made to coordinate these sermons with the appointed lessons for Advent. Depending upon your style of delivery, you may find the manuscripts a bit long. Obviously the most desirable use of these sermons is to think through and adapt the content and rhetoric to your own style and pastoral needs.

Finally, Advent is about anticipation, less of the manger and more about the final revelation of Christ when he leads his ransomed to the inheritance reserved in heaven. Phillips Brooks describes what I pray we will with God’s Spirit accomplish this Advent.

Such men in our community, in our family circles, in our own little groups, whatever they are, any of us may be—men who shall do something to hold the soul of our little group in such expectancy and readiness, in such unwillingness to settle down upon the imperfect present as a finality, that when the inspired word or deed shall come, as it is sure to come some time, it shall find the atmosphere ready to receive it and transmit it.”⁵

Perhaps some parishioner might ask, “Where else in the Old Testament can we find Christ?” Wouldn’t that be great?

³ Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 331–332.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), 5:223–224.

⁵ Phillips Brooks in *For All the Saints*, ed. Frederick J. Schumacher (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1996), vol. 4, 445.

ADVENT WEEK 1

Born, Born, Born, to Living Hope!

Genesis 12:1-3; 18:1-15; John 8:48-58

Thesis: When you understand the Bible as a Book of Advents, especially birth announcements leading to the incarnation of the Son of God in whom you have been given new birth in baptism, then you gain a greater sense of the presence of God for a life of living hope.⁶

1. Back in the seventeenth century there lived a monk named Brother Lawrence. His writings have been collected in a little book called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Brother Lawrence says, “the practice of the presence of God ... is to find joy in his divine company and to make it a habit of life, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him at all times, every moment ...”⁷ **Wouldn’t that be a wonderful outcome for this Advent, to know the presence of God in your life as you’ve never known it before?**⁸ When the work and the challenges of the day are staring you in the face, wouldn’t a sense of God’s presence improve your attitude?⁹ When you are going through times of suffering, maybe even to the point of despair, wouldn’t a strong sense of the presence of God help you persevere?¹⁰ And when tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow stretch out before you, tedium is transformed into *Te Deum*, “We praise You, O God” because God gives you birth to a living hope.¹¹ A growing knowledge of God’s presence comes from learning more about God’s advents, his comings to you. Advent is easily trivialized as simply the birth of baby Jesus, but when you have put away the decorations and are going through the challenging times of your life, is the image of baby Jesus in a manger a “very present help in time of trouble”? (Ps 46:1). From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, the Bible is a Book of Advents. And the Bible is our book, not the world’s, not the dusty book in libraries or archives, not the scholars’ possession. The Bible is our church’s living word of God by which the Spirit assures us that Jesus keeps coming to us, is present with us, and is leading you and me to a wonderful future.

2. **The Old Testament is a great source for deepening our sense of Jesus’s coming to us, of Jesus’s advents.** “Old Testament?” you might think. “Jesus was born in the New Testament.” Think about a “green room.” The “green room” is what they call the waiting room in television studios. If you are going to go on camera to perform or be interviewed, you wait in the green room. At the right time, you go out, do your thing in front of the camera, and then go back and relax in the green room. I suspect many Christians think the Old Testament was like the green room. Jesus was just hanging out waiting to be born and to do all that

⁶ Through decades, seminary students have been taught various ways to articulate the contents and purpose for their sermons. I have found it helpful to give a thesis, a proposition, of what the sermon offers the hearer. *When you ... then ...* Of course, care must be taken so that the thesis is not conditional law but an expression of unconditional gospel that encourages some use of the Means of Grace.

⁷ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981), 68.

⁸ The discipline of boldfacing the topic sentence of each paragraph helps write a more unified paragraph. In oral/aural style the paragraph, not the sentence, carries the main thought the speaker intends to communicate. Boldfacing also helps you check the unity of the entire sermon. Read seriatim, the boldfaced sentences of all the paragraphs should present a succinct summary of the sermon.

⁹ This looks forward to the sermon for Advent 2, “Surely the Lord Is in This Place!”

¹⁰ To be treated in Advent 3, “I AM Has Sent Me to You.”

¹¹ I owe the play on tedium/Te Deum to Dr. Paul W. F. Harms in a sermon he delivered as a professor at Concordia Senior College in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

he did so long ago. And now that he has ascended, he's not really here with us in the times of our lives. We easily slip into the notion that Jesus is back in the green room, just waiting around until he appears at the end of the world.¹² Not true! Our Book of Advents shows that Jesus was already making advents in Old Testament times.

3. **In John chapter 8 Jesus tells us that he indeed was present in the Old Testament.** In this chapter Jesus is talking with some Jews who were proud they were descendants of Abraham. Jesus told them, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (Jn 8:32). They pushed back, proud of their descent from Abraham. Jesus didn't back off. He says, "I speak of *what I have seen with my Father*." In other words, Jesus says he has personally seen things with God the Father. Well, they kept harping on Abraham, so Jesus finally tells them bluntly, "Truly, truly I say to you, *before Abraham was, I am*." "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58). This is not just a one-off, something Jesus said only one time.¹³ When Jesus was praying to the Father in John chapter 17, he said, "Father, glorify me in your own presence *with the glory that I had with you before the world existed*." Again in that same chapter, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world*" (Jn 17:5, 24). And from Revelation, the book that looks ahead to the return of Jesus Christ on the last day to take us to our inheritance in heaven, from the very last chapter of that last book of the Bible, Jesus says, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rv 22:13). Now really, do you think the One who is at the center of all things was just waiting in some "green room" in the Old Testament?

4. Jesus, the Son of God, was there, there and active, and **among his many Old Testament advents was present in a surprising birth announcement to Abraham and Sarah.** Here's their story from Genesis chapter 12: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing' (Gn 12:1-2; cf. Acts 7:2-8). This passage says, "the Lord said to Abram." Who's "the Lord"? Was that just God the Father, while Jesus was off in the "green room" waiting to be born and the Holy Spirit was waiting even longer for the day of Pentecost? No, Jesus was part of this advent to Abraham, and so was the Holy Spirit. "Before Abraham was, I am." The Bible teaches us that the true God is the Triune God, three persons in one God. All three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are involved in our salvation.¹⁴ Thus we confess in the Athanasian

¹² Cf. Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 149. "In short, the modern world quite literally 'manages' without God. We can do so much so well by ourselves that there is no need for God, even in his church. Thus we modern people can be profoundly secular in the midst of explicitly religious activities. Which explains why so many modern Christian believers are atheists unawares. Professing to believe in supernatural realities, they are virtual atheists; whatever they say they believe, they show in practice that they function without practical recourse to the supernatural. ... The call to follow Jesus Christ runs directly counter to this deadly modern pressure toward secularization."

¹³ I would deliver the sentences that follow rapidly, building a crescendo to the last sentence of the paragraph. Unlike literary style, the oral/aural style of communication does not expect the recipient to absorb every sentence but rather groups of sentences, "chunks" as BBC broadcaster John Hilton says.

¹⁴ See, for example, Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972): "The doctrine of the Trinity is the basis of all Christian doctrine; as Lutheran theology throughout the whole of dogmatics portrays the mighty opera ad extra of God, these are clearly seen to be the works of the triune God. ... God's external acts can be summed up under the themes of creation, redemption (Christology), and soteriology"(15). Again, "even these latter theologians in their scholastic manner ascribe, not willy-nilly but deliberately and with care, all the opera ad extra of God (for example, the inspiration of Scripture, conversion, justification, etc.) to the Trinity and to each person of the Trinity" (253), et al.

Creed, “the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.”¹⁵ Already in eternity, the Triune God was determined that blessings would come from the offspring of Abraham to all the families of the earth. But we have a problem. If Abraham’s line is going to bless all nations, you’d expect Abraham and Sarah to have a child. They had none, and Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 99 years old. Childbearing years obviously were past.

5. We page ahead to Genesis 18, another advent to Abraham. “And the Lord appeared to him (Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him.” Abraham got up and welcomed the three men. “And the Lord appeared ...” Some people have speculated that these were the three persons of the Holy Trinity, but the Bible doesn’t say that. Hebrews 13:2 says they were “angels.” “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” However, the three are identified, “The Lord appeared to him.” Now you know, that is God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit announcing the birth of a son to old Abraham and Sarah. “They said to him, ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he said, ‘She is in the tent.’ **The Lord said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son’**” (Gn 18:9). **A birth announcement is coming! “Before Abraham was, I am.”**

6. **Isaac was born, and birth announcements kept coming for centuries to come, birth announcements all leading to the Son of God taking on our human flesh, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.** The first chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew is not read very much, it’s not very stimulating, but it is very revealing. Matthew chapter one is a genealogy. “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob ...” And on and on it goes through centuries until the genealogy climaxes, “and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ” (Mt 1:1-2, 16). This genealogy of birth announcements has a very personal aim, you! You! St. Peter says this eternal Son of God, “was foreknown *before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times* for the sake of you who through him are believers in God” (1 Pt 1:20-21).

7. The title of my sermon is “Born, Born, Born, to Living Hope!” This saving history has been coming straight to you. **Isaac was born, Jesus was born, and you have been born to a living hope.** The birth of Isaac was to Sarah and Abraham, without any doubt, a miracle. St. Paul says,

In hope he (Abraham) believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

(Rom 4:18-21)

¹⁵ Verses 17-18.

Abraham hoped in the promises the Lord spoke to him. Jesus says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that we would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56). The birth of the Son of God to the Virgin Mary was even more miraculous than the birth of Isaac. Isaac was born to a human father and mother, but the incarnation of the holy and sinless Son of God had no earthly father. When the Virgin asked the angel, “How shall this be,” Gabriel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). Just as Abraham had hoped in the birth announcement from God, so Mary answered in complete trust, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). And now these births, all the births in Matthew’s genealogy, come to you.

8. **Baptism is God’s birth announcement that he has a newborn, you!**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pt 1:3-5)

The Son of God who took on human flesh went to the inescapable destiny of sinners, death under the just judgment of God. Jesus was dead, totally dead, but the Triune God raised him to life. That’s what only God can do. From the creation of the world to your baptism, God creates out of nothing. “You were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), but the Triune God has given you ... you, put in your name, put in your name that was spoken when God gave you birth from sin and eternal death to new life and heaven ... the Triune God has given you new birth, miraculous birth because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Triune God intended this for you from eternity, and your baptism is God’s birth announcement that you have been born in Christ to a living hope, to an inheritance reserved in heaven for you. Like Abraham and Mary, now you, born, born, born, to living hope!

9. In closing, **I pray our Advent observance will encourage you with the advents of God into your life.** “Time marches on” people say, and we usually say that with some melancholy. “We fly forgotten as a dream dies at the op’ning day.”¹⁶ Our Book of Advents teaches us something far more inviting. Jesus wasn’t in the “green room” in the Old Testament and he’s definitely not in the “green room” now. Birth announcement after birth announcement, the Triune God has been coming to you. Those comings lead to what Brother Lawrence said, “the practice of the presence of God ... is to find joy in his divine company and to make it a habit of life.” Isaac was born, Jesus was born, and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has given you new birth to the hope of life. “We praise You, O God!” Amen.

¹⁶ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 733:5. Hereafter *LSB*.

SUPPLEMENTAL THOUGHTS

Hymn suggestions

Baptism:

“See This Wonder in the Making,” *LSB* 593

“God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It,” *LSB* 594

Birth of Jesus:

“The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came,” *LSB* 356

“Gentle Mary Laid Her Child,” *LSB* 374

“We Praise You, Jesus, at Your Birth,” *LSB* 382

N. T. Wright: “You could sum all this up by saying that the doctrine of the Trinity, which is making quite a comeback in current theology, is essential if we are to tell the truth not only about God, and more particularly about Jesus, but also about ourselves. The Trinity is precisely a way of recognizing and celebrating the fact of the human being Jesus of Nazareth as distinct from while still identified with God the Father, on the one hand (he didn’t just ‘go back to being God again’ after his earthly life), and the Spirit, on the other hand (the Jesus who is near us and with us by the Spirit remains the Jesus who is other than us). This places a full stop on all human arrogance, including Christian arrogance.”¹⁷

Martin Luther: “We are not so foolish or unlearned as to say that these three men are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in their essence, just as we do not maintain that the humanity of Christ is God in his essence. It is enough for us to have said that these three men signified the Deity which Abraham recognized and believed; for enlightened by the Holy Spirit and full of faith, he saw the day of Christ (Jn 8:56). But just as Abraham believed the Trinity, so this is represented to him outwardly in the appearance of the three men. Of course, these three men are not the three Persons of the Deity; they are signs or an appearance of the Deity in the Trinity, although so far Abraham is of the opinion that they are saintly men who are in exile because of their profession of the true religion.

“But even though Abraham does not know that they are angels, he nevertheless has the conviction that in these three, among whom one was speaking while the rest were in accord, he was hearing God, who is one in his essence and trine in Persons. This is my opinion about this passage. Let him who is so inclined treat it with greater subtlety, provided that he does not do violence to it; for these matters must be given sober consideration.”¹⁸

¹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 113–114.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), 3, 219.