



A D V E N T

e a s t s i d e CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS



December 2

Text: Matthew 3:1–3

Title: Preparation

Big Idea of the Message: God used John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, modeling for us the importance of preparation before receiving from God.

Application Point: We will prepare our lives to receive from Jesus during this Advent season.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- A. The Bible is filled with stories of preparation and waiting for what is to come. The entire Old Testament speaks of a time when God will redeem the world from sin through the Messiah. The story of John the Baptist describes perfectly the anticipation of God's coming Messiah: "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (Matthew 3:1–3)
- B. John was preparing the world for Jesus to come on to the scene. The world had waited thousands of years for this "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The people of Israel had read over and over for thousands of years the promise that one day a Messiah would make the world right and establish God's kingdom. When Jesus started his ministry, people were already excited at the possibility of God doing a new work. John the Baptist prepared people's hearts to meet the Messiah.
- C. The time of Advent is a time of preparation and excitement. It should be a time in which, like John the Baptist, we can prepare our hearts to receive from God. Focusing our hearts and minds on what Christ has done, especially during the craziness of the holidays is vital for our growth.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you prepare for the day? Do you have a morning ritual?
2. What do you think of when you hear the name John the Baptist?
3. What are the ways in which John the Baptist prepared for the coming of the Messiah? How did those around him respond?
4. What are some areas in life where you have a lot of preparations? How does it pay off?
5. What are some ways you can prepare your life to receive from God, especially this Advent season?



December 9

Text: Matthew 25:1–13

Title: Procrastination

Big Idea of the Message: God does not want us to procrastinate and become idle, but to be ready for his return by living lives that are ready to be used by him.

Application Point: We will see every day as an opportunity to live lives that reflect God's kingdom until his return.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- A. Jesus spoke of some young women who procrastinated and weren't prepared. The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13) describes a scene where ten young women were to meet a bridegroom for a wedding feast. All the women had lamps that had to be filled with oil, ready to be lit when the bridegroom was on his way to the wedding feast (vv. 1–4). But the girls fell asleep. At midnight, someone cried out that the bridegroom was coming, and the girls were to run out and meet him with their lamps (vv. 6–7). Five of the virgins were wise and brought extra oil so that their lamps would be sure to burn, but five were foolish and did not bring any extra oil (vv. 8–9). The five foolish women went to buy more oil, but while they were gone the bridegroom arrived and went to the feast with the five wise virgins, leaving the others behind (v. 10) (Richard France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985], 350–51).
- B. The last portion of the parable of the ten virgins describes the foolish ones coming back and the Lord rejecting them. Jesus then tells the crowd why he is speaking this parable: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (v. 13). The hour Jesus is referring to is the time when the Lord returns. The parable was used to describe being prepared for the coming of the Lord. We can often keep the thoughts of Christ's return cataloged somewhere in the back of our minds. In the busyness of everyday life, we can forget that this world as we know it will change. Jesus will return and make right the world we live in. This fact should always ensure we are living lives ready for his return.
- C. Jesus wants our lives to reflect his kingdom. So, we prepare for the Lord by living lives that reflect the coming kingdom. We love others more than ourselves. We are patient, kind, and giving. We embody the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Discussion Questions:

1. Are you a procrastinator? Are there certain things/tasks/conversations that you typically put off? How do those situations typically work out for you?
2. Why do people procrastinate? Can you procrastinate on spiritual matters?
3. Do you relate to any of the young ladies in Jesus's parable in Matthew 25:1-13?
4. What does a life shaped by the kingdom of God look like?
5. Give some practical everyday examples of what embodying the fruit of the Spirit looks like to a Christ follower.



December 16

Text: Luke 2:1–21

Title: Expectations

Big Idea of the Message: God can go beyond the limiting expectations we place on him.

Application Point: We will prepare and be ready to receive from God but will allow him to go beyond our expectations.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- A. As we talk about preparation, we also have to talk about expectations. When you prepare for something, you have an idea of what that “something” will look like. The story of Jesus is a story of God shattering human expectations on who the Messiah is. While he did meet some human expectations, Jesus didn’t look like the messiah people had prepared for.
- B. The birth of Jesus was expected and prepared for, but also unexpected. The Savior of the world was born to a young couple (Luke 2:4–5), fleeing persecution (Matthew 2:13), and born in a barn (Luke 2:7). The King of Israel wasn’t born in a palace surrounded by servants and silk sheets, but in straw surrounded by shepherds (Luke 2:16–18). Mary was not a queen, and Joseph was not a ruling king. The expectation of the coming Messiah was that he would be a warrior king born to a noble family. But Jesus was born into a blue-collar carpenter’s family. No matter how people had prepared and what they expected the Messiah to be, Jesus went beyond their expectations by being a suffering king who allowed himself to be crucified for the world. “Jesus’s willingness to suffer and die stands in marked contrast to the widespread expectation of a coming Messiah who would slay His enemies” (Craig A. Evans, “A Closer Look: Messianic Expectations,” *The Exchange* [blog] *Christianity Today*, March 7, 2012).
- C. Advent is about preparing to receive God’s good gifts. A part of preparation is allowing God to surprise us. Receiving might not always look the way we think it will. Just as Jesus went beyond the limited messianic expectations of the time, God can go beyond our own. Ephesians 3:20 says God “...is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” We can begin to learn more about God and align our expectations with his through prayer. Prayer is relational communication with God. The more we grow in that relationship the more we can recognize his will and align our expectations with his.

Discussion Questions:

1. Name a time when something did not go as planned. How did it make you feel?
2. How do we put expectations on God that limit him?
3. Has there ever been a time when God exceeded the limiting expectations you had on him? Could you share it with us?
4. What were people expecting of the Messiah and how did God shatter those expectations?
5. How can we prepare our hearts to align with God’s will rather than our own expectations?



December 23

Text: Isaiah 40:30–31

Title: Waiting

Big Idea of the Message: Times of preparation are times of waiting, but God is faithful and gives us strength.

Application Point: We will wait on the Lord and receive his will for our lives.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- A. The Scripture found in Isaiah (40:30-31) that John references in Matthew 3:6 should give all of us peace if we are waiting and preparing. Later in the chapter, Isaiah says, “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:30–31). God knows that we can grow frustrated in our time of waiting. But he remains faithful and strengthens us each day.
- B. The context of Isaiah 40 deals with the hope of restoration from the exile of Israel in the Old Testament. God wanted to give people hope while they waited for restoration. This hope of restoration sets the stage for the Anointed One of the Lord that we see in Isaiah 52–53. These passages are used by New Testament writers to reveal the hope of salvation in Jesus (Stephen J. Lennox, *God’s Story Revealed: A Guide to Understanding the Old Testament* [Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2009], 208–10).
- C. In his poem “Celebrating Advent Means Knowing How to Wait,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer described Mary as one person who knew what it was like to have the excitement of preparation and the anxiety of waiting. He says, “For she knows better than anyone what it means to wait for Christ. ... She awaits him as his mother. She knows about the mystery of his coming, about the Spirit that is at play here, about the almighty God who works his wonders” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Celebrating Advent Means Knowing How to Wait”, *The Mystery of Holy Night*).

Discussion Questions:

1. Does waiting come easily for you? Why or why not?
2. Why do you need strength when you are waiting?
3. Isaiah 40:30-31 is an often quoted verse. Why do people find so much comfort and hope in the promise found there?
4. Has God been faithful when you have waited on him? Please share your testimony.
5. How can the faith of Mary encourage us in our time of waiting and preparation?
6. What is something you are waiting for God to do or show to you in your own life?
7. As followers of Christ, do you find waiting for Jesus’s return difficult, exciting, or...? Explain.