



Incarnate
ADVENT 2016

ADVENT DISCUSSION GUIDES

DECEMBER 4-25, 2016

Overview

This Advent we're looking at Isaiah 9. Primarily we're looking at four things that were prophesied about Jesus and how he brought them into the world through his earthly ministry: light, joy, justice, and peace. We're also bringing some Christmas-time liturgy into our community groups. During our group discussions we'll be looking at content that mirrors the way sermons will be preached throughout Advent. Discussion questions will focus on:

Prophecy from Isaiah about how the Messiah would bring light/joy/justice/peace.

- How Jesus incarnated light/joy/justice/peace in his earthly ministry.
- How Jesus provides better light/joy/justice/peace than the world offers us.
- How Jesus brings light/joy/justice/peace in our lives and through us to others.

We'll also be singing together as community groups during our gatherings to further bring some of the special aspects of the season into our time together.

Singing as a group during Advent

Each week throughout Advent you'll see a recommended song to sing as a group. Christians have been singing together as a part of their gatherings for thousands of years. Christmas is one of the few times of year when it isn't abnormal to sing together, no matter your background (or musical skill), and it's one of the few genres in which most of us know the songs. While it can be difficult to get everyone in the mood to sing together, this is a beautiful way for us to come together and worship the Lord in our living rooms. As out of tune and awkward as it might end up, give it a shot! You might be surprised at how well it goes and how much your group benefits from worshiping together.

Lyrics are included here and on the Leader Resources page for you to email, text, or print to give to your group members. You can either sing a cappella or along with the Youtube links provided, whichever is most comfortable for your group. Feel free to include this at any point in your night, whether over dinner, at the beginning before discussion, or at the end to close out your time together.

An Introduction to the book of Isaiah

Isaiah was a prophet amidst a time of turmoil. For centuries Israel had been in an awful cycle. They would honor and obey the Lord and end up thriving as a nation experiencing God's blessings. Sadly, they would eventually grow complacent, disobedient, and start worshiping other deities. Inevitably God would punish them for their disobedience and idolatry, and they would repent and start honoring and obeying the Lord again. This oscillation between obedience and idolatry progressively eroded the once thriving Kingdom of David. In 930 BC Israel split into two nations:



Israel and Judah. By 740 BC, when Isaiah came on the scene, Assyria had become the new ruling force in the region. They would go on to destroy Israel in 722 BC, leaving Judah as the only remnant of David's kingdom.

In the middle of this turmoil, while Israel was being dismantled by an irresistibly powerful empire, Isaiah spoke this rescue message from God himself: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." (Isaiah 45:22) Isaiah was speaking about two things from which Israel needed salvation: the physical oppression of Assyria and the spiritual oppression of their sin. However, Isaiah has a clear emphasis. Speaking of the whole of Israel in Isaiah 1:4, he said, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged." Isaiah tells the people of Israel that, while their needs were many, their first and most pressing problem was their sin.

However, that's not all he said. In response to their problem of sin Isaiah prophesied a coming hope: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2) Isaiah prophesied that God would shine a light into the dark depths of their sinfulness and they would celebrate "as with joy at the harvest." (9:3) This great light is the Promised One of God: For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given. (9:6) Isaiah addresses the problems of the day, sin and oppression, and points towards future deliverance in the incarnate God, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace: Jesus Christ.

Why read Isaiah at Christmas?

Typically churches stick to the gospels of Matthew and Luke around Christmas. Combined they form the familiar Christmas story. One of the challenges Christians face this time of year is taking a fresh look at what feels old hat. When you've heard the same story told the same way for decades, it gets difficult to feel anything in response. Maybe after dozens of Christmases you feel like you've used up all your awe and wonder. If so, you're not alone.

One way to tackle our seasonal apathy is by finding aspects of the Christmas story to explore afresh. This can help revive our hearts to the awesome mystery of the incarnation contained within the simple truth of Christmas: God came in the flesh to save sinners. If we come away from Christmas better understanding this truth, we'll have had a good Christmas.

One aspect we tend to overlook is the body of Old Testament prophecy that points to the coming Messiah. This year we're going to look at a section from the book of Isaiah. In it Isaiah prophesies this about the Messiah: "And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."



What would happen if Jesus, the Prince of Peace, brought his peace to bear in every corner of your life this year? What if you felt joy before the Lord like Isaiah 9:2, or if like 9:3 the light of the Lord shone in your life and drove out darkness? How would it change you? How would it change us as a church?

This year we study Isaiah 9 and ask that the Lord would do these things in our lives, that we would forsake the dead motions of the Christmas season for the living hope held in the Advent of the Promised Son. We study that God would awake our heart to the astounding mystery and unending grace that made God manifest in the flesh, and we pray that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." (9:7)



WEEK 1: LIGHT

In

Matthew 4:12-17, Matthew says that by preaching to the people in Capernaum Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2: “the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light.” The Advent (meaning “arrival”) of the Messiah was the dawning of light in human history. In our sin we had sought out darkness and blinded ourselves to the one true source of life: God himself. Through the incarnation, though, Jesus pierced our darkness both as a revelation of God and by providing the solution to the darkness of sin upon our hearts. This internal darkness is clearly evident across the scope of humanity, but only the word of God provides the true definition of what this darkness is, sin, as well as the true solution, saving faith in Jesus.

Song recommendation: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Understanding

- **Read Isaiah 9:2**
- **What does it mean to “walk in darkness”?**
- **In this context, what does seeing a "great light" mean?**
- **How did Jesus bring light to the world by being born as a human child?**

Evaluating

- **How does Jesus offer a better solution to darkness than the world around us offers?**
- **How has God driven out darkness in your life?**
- **In what areas of your life do you continue to “walk in darkness”?**

Applying

- **How do we bring the light of Jesus to others around us?**



Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Arrangement by Red Mountain Church

Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free
 From our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee.
 Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art,
 Dear desire of ev'ry nation, joy of every longing heart.

Joy to those who long to see thee, Dayspring from on high, appear;
 Come, thou promised Rod of Jesse, of Thy birth we long to hear!
 O'er the hills the angels singing news, glad tidings of a birth
 "Go to him, your praises bringing; Christ the Lord has come to Earth."

Come to earth to taste our sadness, He whose glories knew no end;
 by His life He brings us gladness, Our redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.
 Leaving riches without number, born within a cattle stall;
 This the everlasting wonder, Christ was born the Lord of all!

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



WEEK 2: JOY

Isaiah presents two images here of how the Messiah would eventually bring joy. He explains that joy like being the joy a farmer would experience over the harvest. After months of labor and waiting, praying against disease or drought, the farmer would rejoice in the bounty and usually throw a feast with all the food he just reaped. Isaiah also relates it to rejoicing over the spoils of combat after the war has been won.

This is the kind of joy that Jesus brought by his death and resurrection on our behalf. The battle is over, and the war was won! We have been saved by God from the impending doom of our sin. The joy of having our eternal destiny secured by Jesus on our behalf supersedes all other moments of joy we can experience.

Song recommendation: Joy To The World

Understanding

- **Read Isaiah 9:3**
- **What does it mean to have joy “as...at the harvest”?**
- **Why do you think Isaiah relates this joy to joy over the spoils of war?**
- **How did Jesus’s incarnation provide a source of joy to mankind?**

Evaluating

- **How does Jesus offer a better joy than we can find elsewhere?**
- **What specific ways has the Lord brought joy to your life?**
- **In what ways do you struggle to rejoice over the work of the Lord in your life?**

Applying

- **How do we bring joy to others around us through the gospel?**



Joy To The World

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.

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

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.

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, wonders, of His love.



WEEK 3: JUSTICE

Isaiah is using battle imagery in 9:4-5 to explain how God will sweep away all war and suffering. By saying that the boot of the warrior and blood soaked clothes would be burned, Isaiah is describing an end to war much like Isaiah 2:4: “and they shall beat their swords into plowshares.” God intends to rid our world of all strife and destruction. However, God doesn’t just plan to get rid of war. His ultimate plan is to rid the universe of sin and death by making peace between himself and mankind. Justice through Jesus is comprehensive because it addresses sin, the root cause of all injustice. God’s justice is also revolutionary, because he solved the problem of sin through mercy, not prosecution.

Justice through Jesus is also still coming, because we continue to see and experience injustice amongst humanity. Jesus didn’t do away with the problem of strife immediately; neither does he argue the legal cases of every person in pursuit of civil justice. Instead, he chiefly made us right before the judgment seat of God himself. The promise of the God’s justice brought through Jesus is that everything will one day be made right. That justice is still being brought to bear upon creation, and we get to take part in bringing justice and mercy to our fellowman.

Song recommendation: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Understanding

- **Read Isaiah 9:4-5**
- **What are these verses saying about the Messiah?**
- **How did Jesus bring justice through his death on the cross?**
- **What need for justice do you see in the world around you?**

Evaluating

- **How does Jesus offer a better justice than the world offers?**
- **How are you thankful for the justice Jesus brings?**
- **In what ways do you need to better trust the justice of the Lord?**

Applying

- **How do we bring justice to others around us?**



O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save
And give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



WEEK 4: PEACE

Turn on the news for a split second and you'll see we desperately need peace in our world. We protest, put bumper stickers on our cars, wage wars, pass legislation, and start non-profits all for the sake of peace. However, God didn't propose a solution through a government, exercise plan, or meditation regimen. God's solution wasn't merely in the realm of ideas; ultimately it was incarnated. On the night of Jesus' birth, angels showed up in a field to shepherds and said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)

The incarnation showed us that our real need for peace wasn't institutional, interpersonal, or international, but between God and man. Jesus himself is our peace, and he came that he might "reconcile us . . . to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." (Ephesians 2:14-16) Jesus has made peace between the Father and us, a peace to which "there will be no end." (Isaiah 9:7) This is a peace the world around us can't offer; Jesus himself said, "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27)

Song recommendation: O Come, All Ye Faithful

Understanding

- **Read Isaiah 9:7**
- **Why is it important to Isaiah that the Messiah would bring peace?**
- **How did Jesus bring peace through his death on the cross?**

Evaluating

- **How does Jesus offer a better peace than the world offers?**
- **How has the Lord brought peace to your life?**
- **How do you need the Lord to provide his peace in your life right now**

Applying

- **How can we be peacemakers in the world around us?**



O Come, All Ye Faithful

O Come All Ye Faithful
 Joyful and triumphant,
 O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
 Come and behold Him,
 Born the King of Angels;
 O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him,
 Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,
 Sing in exultation,
 Sing all ye citizens of heaven above.
 Glory to God, glory in the highest;
 O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him,
 Christ the Lord.

Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,
 Born this happy morning,
 Jesus to thee be all glory giv'n.
 Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
 O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him,
 O come, let us adore Him,
 Christ the Lord.

