

Life Group Handout: Advent Edition

Christmas 2023

Greetings, West Side Church! For Christmas this year, we are going to study the “Incarnation of Christ” from three points in redemptive history:

1. The Old Testament: Waiting for God to be with Us (Dec 17)
2. The Gospels: God Has Come to Us in Christ (Dec 24)
3. The New Testament: Our Call to be Representatives of Christ to the World (Dec 31)

There won't be any life group materials for the weeks of Dec 24 or 31. Please enjoy fellowship time with your life groups and families. This means that as a life group, the only subject we are going to look at specifically is “Waiting for God to be With Us.” The people of God, for thousands of years, waited with great anticipation for the arrival of, or *advent*, of the Messiah.

For all the above reasons, this handout will be different than the usual one. You will have to read multiple passages and answer questions throughout. As you read and answer, we'd ask that you focus your efforts on *meditation* rather than just getting the answer right and moving on. Do your best to put yourself into the shoes of the Israelite people. Let their stories act as a catalyst to increase your own anticipation and excitement about the birth of Jesus. That, after all, is the true purpose of having an *Advent season*.

May God bless you as you study and meditate upon His Word, and may your focus upon anticipating Advent grow into a profound joy Christmas morning as we celebrate the birth of Immanuel.

Sincerely,

Pastors Joe, Elias, and Dean

- 1) Please spend some time reflecting on the Israelite people when God plucked them out of Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land. Imagine what 400 years in Egypt felt like. The gods of the Egyptians were abundant, but the God of their Israelite forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was more like a distant memory. He was a God without a temple or an image. Now imagine becoming an enslaved people. Below, describe how *distant* and *far* God would have seemed for these Israelites.
- 2) Next reflect on what it must have been like for Moses to arrive and tell everyone that God has remembered them, heard their cries, and will now act to deliver them. **Read Exodus 4:27-31.** Below describe what would be going through your mind in discovering this incredible news that God has remembered and has come to rescue you out of your slavery.

- 3) Imagine God bringing you through the plagues, the Red Sea, and now into the wilderness where God is with you each day with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of smoke by day. He gives this command in **Exodus 25:1-9**. Read these instructions and meditate on the thought that for the first time, there will be a place where God will dwell with us permanently. Write out the thoughts that would be going through your mind.

- 4) **Read Exodus 29:44-46**. The people discover that the tabernacle, to be called “the tent of meeting,” is not going to be a place any Israelite can go. Rather, priests will work in the Tabernacle. Uniquely, Aaron and his sons will serve as consecrated priests to be the “go-betweens” between man and God. If you were in the shoes of the Israelite people, what would the installment of priests mean for you (remember that temples and priests were standard in their worldview)? Write out your thoughts about this.

- 5) Reflect (for a while) on the differences between the way God is with us through Christ and the way God was with Israel through the priesthood and the tabernacle. Write out your reflections.

- 6) **Read Leviticus 26:1-17**. Imagine that you are an Israelite hearing these words for the first time. What about these promises would fill you with hope about the presence of God among His people? What about these promises would fill you with fear about the presence of God among His people? How hopeful would you be about the future of your nation?

- 7) Though the Israelites had the presence of God among them through the tabernacle and the priesthood, this was not enough to keep them from idolatry as time went on. In the end, God destroyed Israel for their idolatry and scattered them to the ends of the earth. Put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite who has seen their nation destroyed by the hand of the very God who delivered them from Egypt. What struggles of faith, of doubt, or maybe of repentance would be going through your head? What sort of hope would you have for the future?

- 8) **Read Zechariah 2:10-13**. This promise came to the Israelite people after God had restored their nation and brought them back from Babylon. He gives again the promise to be with them and that other nations will be joined to God’s people. If you were them, what hope would you have about that promise coming true? Secondly, what would be different about your hope *this time*?