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COMMUNITY
CHURCH



A D V E N T

Living Hope



CT

Advent: Living Hope

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to have hope amid trying times? Hope is more than a feeling; it isn't simply being perpetually optimistic or having a "hopeful" attitude. Scripture offers us an understanding of hope that is much more robust. Christian hope has heft, endurance, and purpose—and God is its source.

God, "in his great mercy . . . has given us new birth into a living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3). And it is our "God of hope" who enables us to "overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). This reality isn't true only in good times; in fact, it is in dark and difficult times when hope truly shows its mettle.

As Jay Y. Kim writes in "Hope Is an Expectant Leap,"

This is what Christian hope looks like. It doesn't ignore fear, anxiety, and doubt; it confronts them. It holds steady, clinging to peace in the midst of chaos. Through life's many treacherous storms . . . Christian hope is buoyed by something greater that *has happened* and something greater that *is going to happen again*.

CT's 2020 Advent project explores the theme of hope as it weaves throughout the biblical story. In these daily devotional readings, we reflect on the hope of God's people in the Old Testament as they relied fully upon God in difficulty and hardship. We look at prophecies and promises of hope that pointed toward the First Advent: the coming of the Messiah. We contemplate the miracle of hope breaking through in the Incarnation, when "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" as a human baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (John 1:14; Luke 2:12). And we reflect on our hope in Christ's future coming—the Second Advent we await—that gives us endurance, confidence, and joy in our daily lives, no matter what difficulties we might face.

This is our "living hope" or, as the New Living Translation puts it, our "great expectation." Our hope is animated by our confident expectation that the child who was born *will* one day come again in glory to put all wrong things right, and his kingdom will have no end.

KELLI B. TRUJILLO

Editor

**PRAISE BE TO THE
GOD AND FATHER
OF OUR LORD JESUS
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1 Peter 1:3-5

How to Use This Resource

- Begin by reading “Hope Is an Expectant Leap” by Jay Y. Kim.
- Each day, read the assigned Scripture and short article, then prayerfully reflect on the prompt at the end. If you’d like, take notes in the space provided.
- For deeper engagement, use the weekly Bible study sessions on your own or with a small group.
- To use this resource with your family, check out our ideas for families. They highlight suggestions for hands-on projects and fun experiences that will help kids and teens explore key ideas from each week.
- The Bible reading guide highlights the main assigned Scripture passages for each day’s reading. This guide can be printed out and used as an easy reference; it can also serve as a resource for sermon planning.
- You can use the images provided in this download to promote this series within your church, to visually accompany sermons, or to serve other uses that fit your church’s needs.

ADVENT: LIVING HOPE

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Hope Is an Expectant Leap

ADVENT REMINDS US THAT CHRISTIAN HOPE IS SHAPED BY WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN.

BY JAY Y. KIM

My mother, Young Kim, was born in Korea in 1948 as the nation was on the precipice of civil war. By the time she was five, the country had divided into two, North and South. Her family, once prosperous, had lost everything. Both of her parents died while she was just a teenager. She lost her two older brothers just a few years later. My mother eventually found herself in a troubled marriage. She separated from my father, and in her early 30s she immigrated to the United States as a single parent with a bag of clothes, a few dollars in hand, and me, a toddler at the time. Her life has been a story of struggle, grief, and loss. And yet, despite the challenges, she has always been the most hopeful person I know.

If you had the chance to ask her, she would tell you without the slightest doubt or hesitation that Jesus is the singular source of her hope. She would tell you that since the day she encountered the risen Christ almost 40 years ago, circumstances have taken a constant back seat to something far more immutable and unchanging. But that something isn't a pristine or sophisticated utopian fairy tale built upon happy thoughts or fantasies of a problem-free life. Her hope is a gritty and often grueling grip on something far more substantive. It's a resolute, unwavering hold on something that *has happened* and *will happen*.

In 1 Peter 1:13 we read, "Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming." In the original Greek, the word translated as "alert" (*anazōnnyimi*) is a term describing physical preparation. It derives from a common practice in the ancient Near East: people gathering up their long outer garment and tucking it in to prepare for physical action, be they farmers heading out to the fields, soldiers going off to battle, or runners girding up their clothing to race without hindrance.

I wonder if Peter was thinking back to one of his early encounters with the risen Christ as he wrote these words in his first epistle. At the end of John's gospel, we read the story of the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Peter and the others are fishing, but as soon as they recognize Jesus calling to them from the shore, Peter "wrapped his outer garment around him . . . and jumped into

the water” (21:7). *He wrapped his outer garment.* It’s the same word and imagery he uses in 1 Peter 1:13. When Peter saw Jesus revealed on the shores of Galilee, he immediately wrapped up his garment and took action. Several decades later, Peter invites the early followers of Jesus to take the same action toward the hope they—and we—have in “the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.”

EXPECTATION AND ACTION

Some linguists suggest that the word *hope* shares etymological roots with the word *hop*, conveying that to hope for something is to leap in expectation, to hop toward possibility. True or not, the idea poses an interesting point. In our day and age, the idea of hope has been co-opted by passivity, neutered from its intended action-oriented nature. We hope the lines aren’t too long. We hope for a good diagnosis. We hope everything will work out.

Today, hope is most often thought of as a grown-up version of wishing. This is why, when our hopes seem a bit too outlandish, we may call them “wishful thinking.” But Christian hope is not wishful thinking. Christian hope is an expectant leap forward. We hope for action. We live in motion. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson renders the beginning of 1 Peter 1:13 this way: “So roll up your sleeves.” Christian hope is about rolling up our sleeves and getting to work. It’s a blue-collar sort of hope, making us ready and willing to get our hands dirty, to labor and toil our way toward expectation and promise.

This radically counterintuitive nature of Christian hope is shaped by a resilience and fortitude that’s woefully missing from pop-culture renderings of hope. Christian hope does not shy away from but rather rushes toward the suffering and pain in our world. Tim Keller writes, “While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life’s joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world’s sorrows, tasting the coming joy.” Christian hope is not deceived by the world’s promises of comfort and ease in this life, all the while waiting anxiously for the other shoe to drop. Instead, Christian hope settles into the struggle of human experience with strength and resolve. Yes, there is pain and suffering in this life, but Christian hope enables its recipients to stand tall with every ounce of *imago Dei* dignity possible.

I think of my friends Landon and Sarah Baker. Our community rejoiced when they shared the news that they were expecting. But when the baby was born, there

were complications. In the middle of a global pandemic, I walked into the hospital’s NICU with a mask over my face to dedicate a beautiful little girl whose life on earth would span less than three days. With tears streaming, the young parents prayed over their daughter and held her as she breathed her last and entered eternity. They read the Psalms over her and sang of their love for Jesus. Even in their pain, their hope never wavered.

I think of my friend Darren Johnson, who went well over a year without a job. With a family to support and bills to pay, the situation was dire. He wasn’t unemployed for lack of trying. Things simply weren’t working out and

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he didn’t know why. But in his confusion, he continued to pray, worship, lead his family with courage, and serve his community. He was convinced that God was still working and moving even in the smallest details of his perplexing circumstances, though he didn’t know how. In his uncertainty, he modeled monumental faith. His hope never wavered.

I think of my friend Christina Tang. A gifted songwriter in her early 20s, she’d been working on a collection of songs when she received the news that there was cancer in her stomach—and it was aggressive. There was sadness and confusion all around. But then there was resolve. Even with her body weakening, Christina continued to write and record. She found strength to lead worship from time to time at church. When her hands could no longer strum the

guitar, she recruited musician friends to play along. A couple of weeks after her death, we gave everyone in the church a copy of her new album: six original songs painstakingly written and recorded in her final months. Her hope never wavered.

This is what Christian hope looks like. It doesn't ignore fear, anxiety, and doubt; it confronts them. It holds steady, clinging to peace in the midst of chaos. Through life's many treacherous storms—be they pandemics, political divisions, social unrest, or personal struggle—Christian hope is buoyed by something greater that *has happened* and something greater that is going to *happen again*.

HE WILL COME BACK, SO ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES

Advent is our great reminder of this. This time of year, many front yards are transformed into Nativity scenes. But this season we're about to enter is less a journey into history and much more a journey toward the future. Advent, which comes from the Latin

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adventus, meaning *arrival*, is our long and steady gaze forward, backlit by history. The light of the Christmas story breaks into the darkness of our past guilt, present pain, and future anxieties, pointing us to brighter days ahead.

In Acts 1:11, as the first followers of Jesus witness his ascension into heaven, they are reminded that “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven,

will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” *He will come back*. This is the promise we celebrate and remember during Advent, and it is the bedrock of Christian hope. Remember Peter's words: “Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.” We roll up our sleeves and get on about the work of Christian hope because Christ is coming again. We can face anything and everything with resilience, fortitude, and patience because Advent reminds us of how the story ends. This is why Paul writes, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. . . . For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Rom. 8:18, 24–25).

My mother turned 70 a couple of years ago. Visiting Hawaii had long been on her bucket list, so we went. We stayed near Waikiki Beach, and from our hotel window we could see Diamond Head, one of the most popular and strenuous hikes on the island. I asked my mother if she wanted to try it. Without hesitation she said yes. The Diamond Head trail is 1.6 miles roundtrip, almost straight up, climbing nearly 600 feet from the trailhead to the summit. I immediately regretted asking; I wasn't sure she could do it at her age.

The next morning, we made the short drive to the trailhead. I asked her again if she really wanted to do this, reassuring her that we could turn back and go enjoy some poke bowls on the beach instead. She smiled and began marching onward. About halfway up, seeing her exhaustion and exhausted myself, I asked her again if she wanted to turn back. She looked at me, smiled, and rolled up her sleeves. We continued on and eventually enjoyed the spectacular view from the summit. Of course we did. This is how hope works for my mother. And this is how Christian hope works. We roll up our sleeves and take one grueling step after another until we arrive.

Once we returned to the hotel for a rest, we used FaceTime to call my kids—her grandchildren—back at home. My mother beamed as she told her newborn grandson all about conquering Diamond Head. He'd been born just three months earlier, and she'd given him his Korean name: *So-Mahng*, which means *hope*. Of course.

JAY Y. KIM is lead pastor of teaching at WestGate Church, teacher in residence at Vintage Faith Church, and author of *Analog Church*. He lives with his family in Silicon Valley.

Week 1

He Will Come Again in Glory

We live in the “in between”—after Christ’s first coming and before his return. This week, we reflect on the nature of Christian hope as we await the Second Advent.



**LOOK, I AM COMING SOON! . . . I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA,
THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE BEGINNING AND THE END.**

Revelation 22:12-13

12/02
ADVENT AND
APOCALYPSE

BY FLEMING RUTLEDGE

Mark 13:24–37
Luke 21:25–28

THEY WILL SEE THE
SON OF MAN COMING
IN A CLOUD WITH
POWER AND GREAT
GLORY . . . STAND UP
AND LIFT UP YOUR
HEADS, BECAUSE
YOUR REDEMPTION
IS DRAWING NEAR.

Luke 21:27–28

During Advent, we hear passages of Scripture that are infused with the language of darkness, tribulation, and apocalypse. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each have one fully apocalyptic chapter. In Mark 13, Jesus says, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (v. 8, RSV throughout). The passage only gets darker as it goes. “In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (vv. 24–25). Why is Jesus talking like this about death and destruction instead of talking about sheep, shepherds, and heavenly hosts?

In Scripture, apocalyptic writing comes out of catastrophe. The Israelites were a favored people; God had promised them a future of safety and prosperity. But then they were conquered and forced into exile in the Babylonian empire. Humanly speaking, there was no hope for them. When the Israelites found themselves in crisis, it was “a theological emergency.” It was out of this emergency that a new apocalyptic way of thinking took shape. It started with the second half of Isaiah (chapters 40–55)—written during the Babylonian captivity, when everything seemed so hopeless—and it blossomed from there. By the time of Jesus, apocalyptic language was everywhere.

Apocalyptic theology is, above all, the theology of hope—and hope is the polar opposite of optimism. Optimism fails when it is swallowed up in darkness. By contrast, hope is found in something beyond human history. It is found in an incarnate God.

In Luke’s gospel, when Jesus speaks apocalyptically of “signs in the sun and moon and stars” and the “distress of nations,” he ends by saying that humanity “will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (21:25–27). He is speaking of his second coming. He’s telling us that our great hope comes not through any human development but through himself. He possesses sovereign power that is independent of human history. In spite of the apparent darkness, God in Christ is shaping our history in accordance with his divine purposes.

Advent tells us to look directly into the darkness and name it for what it is. But this is not the end of the story. Jesus said, “Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

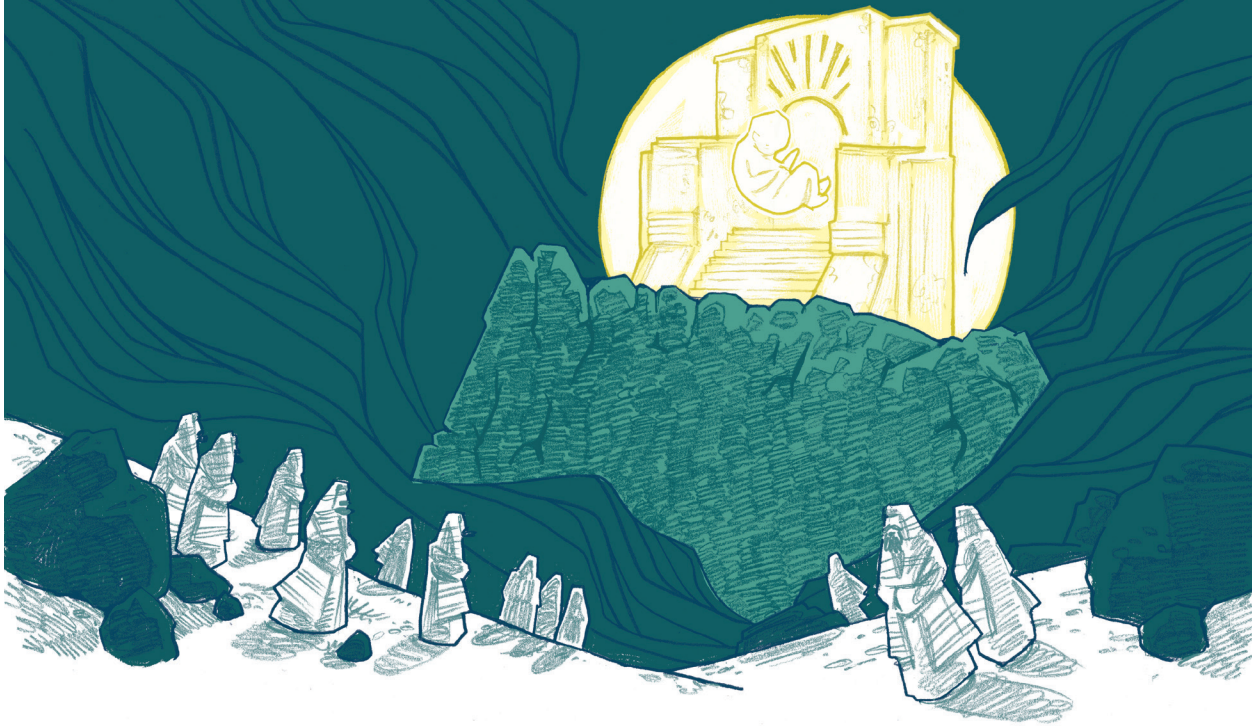
This is adapted from a longer article titled “Why Apocalypse Is Essential to Advent,” published December 18, 2018, on ChristianityToday.com.

READ MARK 13:24–37 AND LUKE 21:25–28. Which parts of Jesus’ teaching do you gravitate toward? Which are harder to grapple with? How do these depictions of God’s sovereign power over history deepen your hope?

Week 2

God's Presence and His Promises

This week, we consider the hope of God's people in the Old Testament as they relied fully upon him in difficulty and hardship. And we ponder the prophecies and promises of hope that pointed toward the First Advent: the coming of the Messiah.



FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN. . . .
HE WILL REIGN ON DAVID'S THRONE AND OVER HIS KINGDOM.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Week 3

Immanuel: God with Us

This week, we contemplate the miracle of hope breaking through in the First Advent, as God miraculously worked in the lives of ordinary people like Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, and Elizabeth to enter into the world as Immanuel—God with us.

**YOU WILL CONCEIVE AND
GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND
YOU ARE TO CALL HIM JESUS.
HE WILL BE GREAT AND WILL
BE CALLED THE SON OF THE
MOST HIGH. . . . HIS KINGDOM
WILL NEVER END.**

Luke 1:31–33



12/18 THE LIGHT AND THE KING

BY JAY Y. KIM

Isaiah 9:2-7; 40:1-5
Luke 1:57-80; 3:1-6

AND YOU, MY CHILD,
WILL BE CALLED A
PROPHET OF THE MOST
HIGH; FOR YOU WILL
GO ON BEFORE THE
LORD TO PREPARE
THE WAY FOR HIM.

Luke 1:76

Zechariah and Elizabeth named their baby John, which means *God is gracious and has shown us favor*. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah prophesied over his son: “You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:76-79).

When we fast-forward to John the Baptist’s adult life, we see he does exactly that. Luke records,

He went into all the country . . . preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God’s salvation.’” (3:3-6)

These ideas from Isaiah about reshaping valleys, hills, and roads to prepare the way were, in the ancient world, associated with the arrival of royalty. And, indeed, John’s ministry focused on this one thing: declaring that a king was on the way.

Zechariah’s prophecy over his newborn includes a paraphrase of another passage from Isaiah: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (9:2). The people who heard Zechariah prophesy these words would have known exactly what this Isaiah passage was about: the promise of a coming king. It’s part of the same familiar passage that declares, “For to us a child is born . . . He will reign on David’s throne” (vv. 6-7).

This offers such immense hope for us. As much as we may like to believe that we can create the peace and joy we desire through our own efforts, the story of John the Baptist and the words of Zechariah and Isaiah emphatically declare that the peace and joy every human longs for will not be realized until the king arrives. John the Baptist literally gave his life to proclaim this truth—to help people see that a light was about to break through the darkness.

This article is adapted from a sermon Jay Y. Kim preached on December 9, 2018. Used by permission.

CONSIDER LUKE 1:57-80 ALONGSIDE ISAIAH 9:2-7; 40:1-5; AND LUKE 3:1-6.

Which parts of Zechariah’s prophecy stand out to you? How do these passages convey the hope of Advent?

Week 4

A Savior is Born

Christ was born into a world of pain and darkness. This week, we consider the hope of the Incarnation as we reflect on the stories of those who interacted with the newborn Savior. And we consider the hope Advent offers in our own experiences of pain and darkness as we trust in the one who was, who is, and who is to come.



MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION, WHICH YOU HAVE PREPARED
IN THE SIGHT OF ALL NATIONS: A LIGHT FOR REVELATION TO THE
GENTILES AND THE GLORY OF YOUR PEOPLE ISRAEL.

Luke 2:30-32

12/24 ADVENT ANEW

BY MARLENA GRAVES

John 1:1-18

THE WORD BECAME
FLESH AND MADE HIS
DWELLING AMONG US.
WE HAVE SEEN HIS
GLORY, THE GLORY OF
THE ONE AND ONLY
SON, WHO CAME FROM
THE FATHER, FULL OF
GRACE AND TRUTH.

John 1:14

The Word—the source of creation, the true light—entered humanity as a helpless babe born in humble circumstances. From a human perspective, Jesus’ birth is quite shocking. Why didn’t he, the God-man, first appear as a strapping young man flexing his divine muscles with spectacular feats for all to see? Angels could have trumpeted his coming throughout the whole world! But they didn’t; an angel choir lit the night sky for only a few isolated shepherds.

Contrast Jesus’ advent with first-century Roman generals arriving in town with fanfare and flourish after a military victory. They wanted to see and be seen, aiming to impress as they displayed power and demanded homage. Jesus came quietly and unobtrusively, demanding nothing.

Jesus’ mode of arrival, his life among Jewish peasants, and his eventual execution as a criminal certainly seem like a counterintuitive plan for persuading the world that he’s the Messiah. Yet John asserts: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14).

The glory John testifies to doesn’t comport with our human conceptions of glory and power. While the disciples witnessed many miraculous examples of Christ’s power, in John’s gospel the greatest demonstration of Jesus’ glory is *the Cross*. Jesus himself makes this plain: “‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified . . . And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die” (12:23, 32–33).

The shocking humility of the manger points us toward the humiliation of the cross. This is our strange and otherworldly hope: The Word who was born as a helpless infant is the Savior who came to die a criminal’s death—for us. When we receive him, John says, we enter into his light and life.

Sometimes I find myself among Jesus’ followers who still wrestle with questions (see Matt. 28:17; Mark 9:24; John 20:24–29). When I do, I turn back to John 1:14. The disciples had seen and been with Jesus. They’d eaten with him, traveled with him, fished with him, laughed with him, grieved with him—with *God, face to face*. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus so profoundly transformed them that they were willing to abandon everything to suffer and even die for Jesus. That reality quells my doubts.

I also think about the miracle we celebrate this Christmas Eve: Jesus, the babe in the manger who was “in very nature God” yet “made himself nothing” for us (Phil. 2:6–7). I think of the Christ child who grew up to die and rise again for my sins, offer me true hope, and make all things new. In those moments, Jesus, Faithful and True, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, appears to me afresh (Rev. 19:11; John 14:6). Advent anew.

CONTEMPLATE JOHN 1:1-18. (Optionally, also read John 12:23–36 and Philippians 2:6–11.) Ponder the mystery and glory of the Incarnation. What spiritual responses—like worship, trust, hope—are stirred up in you?

Contributors



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