



Advent Meditations

a space for entering more deeply into God's story
through Scripture, art, and creative response

Advent Meditations

I didn't grow up with Advent—except for one Christmas when mom made a wreath and each week we lit another candle. I would half listen as dad read from the book of Isaiah or Matthew, mesmerized by the cadence of his voice and the flickering flames.

Then, for years, I forgot about Advent. I'd speed through each December—from one Christmas party to the next, from one overpacked mall to another. Despite the glittering lights and glasses of eggnog, Christmas left me drained. That's when I began to appreciate the gift of Advent.

Advent invites us to reflect (rather than rush) our way through the Christmas season. But more than that, Advent helps us grasp our place in God's story, to sense in our gut the divine timeline on which we live. During Advent, we reach back to a perfect world gone wrong and the God who descended into its chaos. With the other hand, we reach forward to the King who is returning to set everything right.

My hope is that this Advent devotional will draw your mind, heart, and imagination deeper into God's story. Each meditation includes a Scripture text, work of art, and prompt for reflection. The meditations begin on Monday following the first Sunday of Advent.

Although Advent technically ends on Christmas Eve, God's story doesn't end with Jesus in a manger. His first coming launches our excitement for his second coming. The devotionals after Christmas will prime your anticipation for Jesus' second return—a great way to start the New Year.

Getting Started:

1. You'll notice these meditations are short. Consider that an invitation to slow down and enter into a space of communion with God.
2. You may want to keep a journal, pen, and colored pencils nearby.
3. Some days include digital media. If you are viewing this document on your device, you'll find links embedded. If not, you can find these peices of art at www.faihandtheotherfive.com/advent/.

May we grow deeper in our appreciation of God's story and our expectation of Jesus' return when he will restore this world under his rule,

Shannon Gianotti Baker

Week One . Groaning . Monday

Read: Genesis 3:6-19

Adam and Eve's rebellion against God had consequences: for them, for us, and for the natural world. This Advent we find ourselves in a world that groans under the weight of God's curse, and we groan with it.



9.8 Meters Per Second Per Second, [Mary McCleary](#), 2005, used with permission

Engage:

After reflecting on Genesis 3 and *9.8 Meters Per Second Per Second*, consider how the world around you is groaning. Lament to God about the brokenness of this life.

Week One . Groaning . Tuesday

Read: Romans 8:20-23

Because of humanity's rebellion, God subjected the world to frustration and decay. It groans and we groan. It struggles and we struggle. It waits and we wait...



By Babel's Stream We Sat and Wept
Grace Carol Bomer, 2006, used with permission

Engage:

On a piece of paper, draw five circles—one each for your friends or family, your work, your city, your country, and the world. In each circle, sketch a struggle experienced there. Then, offer each struggle to the One who can and will bring freedom.

Week One . Groaning . Wednesday

Read: Jeremiah 12:1-4

Evil has scarred this world, bringing fear instead of joy, abuse instead of love, death instead of life. It can feel like evil is winning. But God sees.



Testimonies of Nature (Burnt, Scarified)
Burnt cherry, gold leaf, patinaed copper (18"h, 26"w, 9.5"deep). Private Collection.
[Ted Prescott](#), 1991, used with permission

Engage:

Spend five minutes looking at *Testimonies of Nature*. Ask the Holy Spirit to see into you and show you the burnt and scarred areas he wants to access.

Week One . Groaning . Thursday

Read: Malachi 4:1-3

Evil runs rampant in our countries. Terrorism strikes fear in our hearts. Oppression fills the world. But one day, God will bring justice. Groaning—for those who "revere his name"—will not last forever.



Grace Foretold

(Mineral Pigments, Gold on Kumohada)

[Makoto Fujimura](#), from Images of Grace—Charis and Hours, used with permission

Engage:

Both Malachi 4 and *Grace Foretold* invite us beyond groaning and into longing. Look at today's [New York Times headlines](#). Bring five news items to God in prayer. Allow yourself to long deeply for him to come and set things right.

Week One . Groaning . Friday

Read: Isaiah 60:18-20

During the holiday season, we get a glimpse of our culture's longing for a different world, one where there is peace on earth and love between people—a world that that prophet Isaiah promised. With them, we also long for it.



From *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Breuggemann*
Walter Breuggemann, used with permission. Read by [Sarah Frase](#).

Engage:

Grab a piece of paper and draw two circles labeled "Our World" and "Our Longing."
Distribute words from Isaiah 60 and *The Grace and Impatience to Wait* into each circle
and then, as you pray, add some of your own.

Week One . Groaning . Saturday

Read: Isaiah 9:1-7

We wait—along with the nation of Israel who heard Isaiah's words—for the Light that will dispel all darkness. They waited in gloom and despair. What words describe your waiting?



Messiah: For Unto Us a Child Is Born, by George Frideric Handel
Conducted by Sir Colin Davis with the London Symphony Orchestra and Tenebrae Choir

Engage:

Close your eyes and listen to *For Unto Us a Child Is Born*. As you listen, invite the Holy Spirit to deepen your capacity to wait (and long) for God to fulfill his promises.

Week Two . Glimmers . Sunday

Read: Genesis 3:11-19

We get the first glimmer of Isaiah 9's promised child on the day that Adam and Eve first rebelled against God. Even as he cursed the ground he'd made, God promised that one of their descendants would set things right and crush the serpent's head.



Mary and Eve

Sr Grace Remington, 2003, used with permission of [Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey](#)

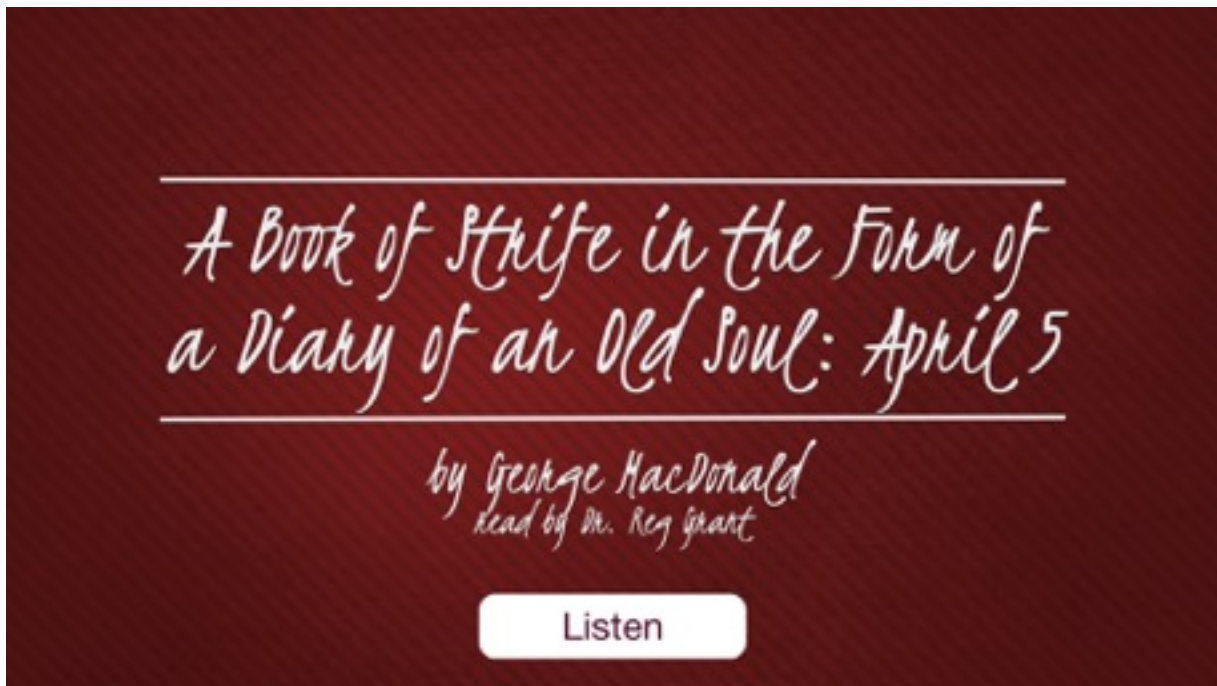
Engage:

On a blank piece of paper, scribble color patches to represent the different evils you've heard about this month—evil that, one day, Jesus will crush underfoot. Then ball up the paper and crush it underfoot.

Week Two . Glimmers . Monday

Read: Genesis 22:15-18

In response to Abraham's obedience, God gave him a glimpse into the future. His offspring, Jesus, would bless all nations (Gal 3:16). Jesus' obedience would make the difference—rescuing the world from brokenness and bringing every bliss.



by George MacDonald,
read by [Dr. Reg Grant](#), Department Chair of [Media Arts & Worship](#),
Dallas Theological Seminary

Engage:

Write and draw a circle around the words "God's promise to Abraham and us." Around this, cluster words (mind-map style) from Genesis 22 and MacDonald's poem. Add color and your own words. Thank God for his promise to Abraham.

Week Two . Glimmers . Tuesday

Read: Deuteronomy 18:15-18

When God spoke to Israel at Horeb, they begged him to stop, certain it would kill them (Ex. 20:18-19). God agreed, promising to send a human messenger instead. Then, 1,200 years later, God bent down, put on skin, and became the messenger himself.



Bending to Love (Hesed Love) Kintsokuroi: to Repair with Gold
Grace Carol Bomer, 2013, used with permission

Engage:

God shared a glimmer of his plan with Israel. He would come as a human—to release them from the grip of evil and to offer hope and healing. Spend five minutes meditating on *Bending to Love* and worshipping our God who bends down.

Week Two . Glimmers . Wednesday

Read: 2 Samuel 7:8-13

King David would face wars, treason, and treachery from his own family, but early in his reign God promised that one of his descendants would rule forever. We wait for that descendant. He will bring justice and peace (Is 9:7) to a world of racism and war.



Psalm XXIII

[Sandra Bowden](#), collagraph mixed media, used with permission

Engage:

Draw your country's flag. Then, draw the [flags](#) of two other countries that have been in the news lately. On behalf of the Christians suffering in those countries, beg the Son of David to come soon and take up his throne.

Week Two . Glimmers . Thursday

Read: Isaiah 53:1-6

God promised a king who would rule forever in justice, peace, and righteousness (2 Sam 7, Is 9), and our world needs that. But our problems go deeper than bad government. We need someone to rescue us from the evil lodged inside us as well.



dusk to dusk, [Katie Fisher](#) 2015, carbon paper, paint, and plexi-glass, used with permission

Engage:

After reflecting on *dusk to dusk*, draw an outline of a cross, then divide it into five or six sections. As you color in each section, identify areas of sin or rebellion in your life.

Reflect on your need for the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53
to rescue you from those evils.

Week Two . Glimmers . Friday

Read: Zechariah 2:10-11

To an exiled people who felt that God was far away, he promised to dwell with them—physically and not just spiritually. One day, God will live among us, and his presence will renew what sin has stained, warped, and shattered.



Come to the Feast

[Grace Carol Bomer](#), 2014, oil and cold wax medium, used with permission

Engage:

Step into the painting above. What will it be like to see Jesus across the table? To hear his laugh? To feel his fingers touch yours as he passes the wine? Today, look someone in the eye and say, "One day, I'll be looking at Jesus, just like I'm looking at you."

Week Two . Glimmers . Saturday

Read: Isaiah 11:1-9

Jesus' future kingship will change the course of history. He will bring international peace, justice for the disenfranchised, and harmony to the natural world.



The Trumpet Child, [Over the Rhine](#), 2007

Engage:

1. As you listen to *The Trumpet Child*, what word or phrase grabs your attention?
 2. Holding that word/phrase in mind, reread Isaiah 11:1-9. What comes into focus?
 3. Now hold that in mind and listen to the song again. Finally, respond in worship.
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Week Three . Nearing . Sunday

Read: Luke 1:5-23

God was drawing near to fulfill his promises, but Zechariah—the first person he told—struggled to believe it, knowing how many years it'd been since Elizabeth's last period. Zechariah gets a bad rap, but don't we struggle to believe God's promises, too?



Archangel Gabriel Amazes Zechariah with Dumbness
Alexander Ivanov, 1840-1850s, watercolor on paper, [source image](#)

Engage:

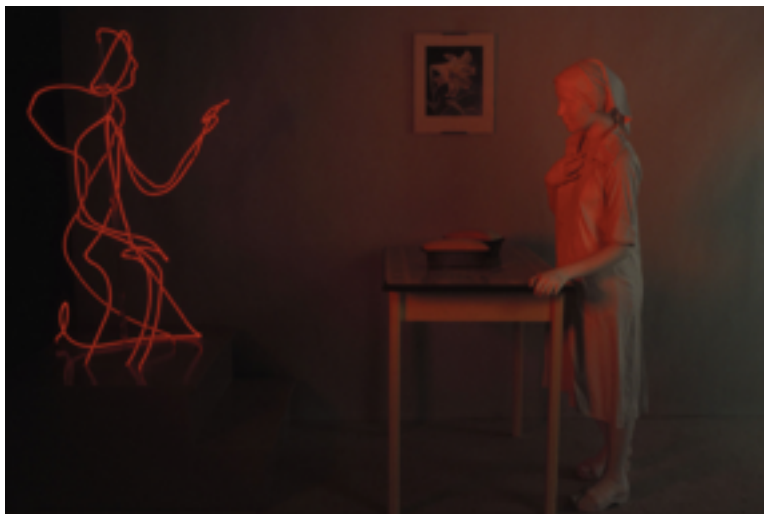
Which Advent promise do you have a hard time believing from "the bottom of [your] toes to the edges of [your] finger tips" (to quote [Brueggemann's prayer](#))? Write a letter of confession to Jesus, admitting the strands of doubt that mingle with your faith.



Week Three . Nearing . Monday

Read: Luke 1:26-38

A young woman, living 1,000 years after King David, starts her day. With Rome ruling the world, the promise to David of a descendant who would reign forever seems more like a forgotten dream than a future reality. But all that changes in a moment.



The Annunciation, [Ted Prescott](#), 1978-9, used with permission

Engage:

The angel's visitation took place 2,000 years ago and we are still waiting. It can seem like God is slow in keeping his promises, but he's not. Mary's reality changed in an instant. How will your reality change in that approaching moment when Jesus returns?

Week Three . Nearing . Tuesday

Read: Luke 1:39-45

Who else, besides Elizabeth, would believe that Mary's pregnancy was from God? Pharisees would throw dirty looks and childhood friends would gossip. Mary believed God, but the road to seeing his promises fulfilled wouldn't be easy.



Incarnation

Jason Custer, 2015, used with permission

Engage:

Visualize the end of your street. Sometimes, that's how God's promises feel—we know they're there, but they seem distant— not quite as real as our iPhones or our lunch. Now, walk to the end of your street and contemplate how, like Mary, we are on the road to seeing God's promises fulfilled.

Week Three . Nearing . Wednesday

Read: Luke 1:46-56

The Roman Empire couldn't thwart him. Evil wouldn't stop him. The hypocrisy of his chosen people wouldn't hinder him. God had remembered his promises and begun to fulfill them. Like Mary, we can revel in the fact that *this* is our God.



Magnificat, [Todd Agnew](#), 2006, from Do You See What I See?

Engage:

Listen to *Magnificat*. Allow Mary's words to draw you into worship. Sing with her to our God, the one who has already begun to fulfill his promises. Find the [lyrics here](#).

Week Three . Nearing . Thursday

Read: Luke 1:57-80

Elizabeth gave birth to a son and Zechariah got his voice back, but that wasn't all. For a moment, the Holy Spirit let Zechariah see what God was drawing near to do—to save Israel from their enemies, yes, but also to purify a people for himself.



Golden Fire

[Makoto Fujimura](#), 2007, used with permission

Engage:

Draw (or find) objects to represent the following: 1) Zechariah's prophecy that God will make us holy, without fear, and at peace, 2) your sin before Jesus intervened, and 3) your current state of transformation. Praise God for beginning to fulfill his promises.



Week Three . Nearing . Friday

Read: Matthew 1:1-17

God broke into history. By entering into Mary's womb he welded himself with humanity forever. No going back. He would fulfill the promises to Abraham, David, and the exiles. He would save his people—spiritually at first, then physically later on.



Behold this is Our God for whom we have waited
Nicora Gangi, 2015, used with permission

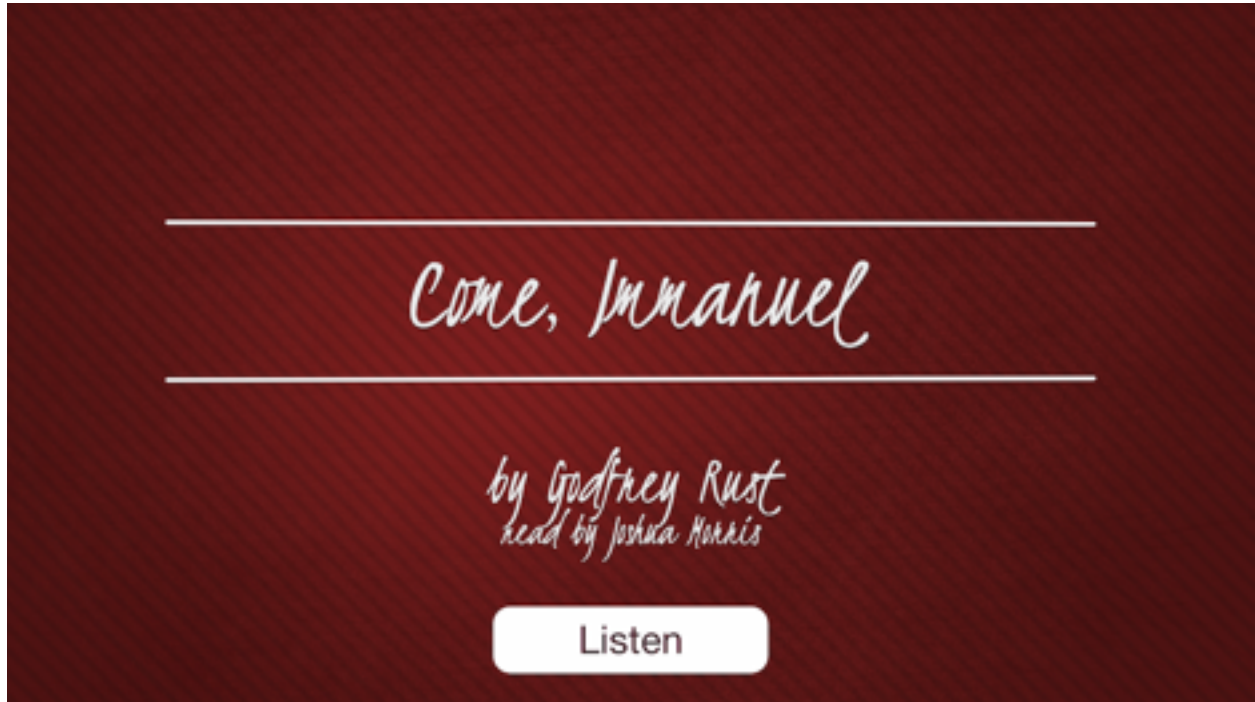
Engage:

Draw the people in your family tree as far back as you can. When did God break into your lineage? Represent this by drawing a yellow ribbon that weaves itself into your family line. Praise God for breaking into history and joining himself with humanity.

Week Three . Nearing . Saturday

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

As God drew near to take up residence inside Mary, he truly became Immanuel, God with us. He would share our experience of life—its joys and pains, its laughter and grief. Jesus would be God living among us.



Come, Immanuel
© by [Godfrey Rust](#), produced with permission.
Performed by [Joshua Morris](#).

Engage:

Listen twice to *Come, Immanuel*, then add a verse inviting God to come and be Immanuel in the brokenness of your world.

Week Four . Finding . Sunday

Read: Luke 2:1-7

God made his debut as a human, but there was no room for him. So, he started off homeless and asleep in a feeding trough. Only a few people recognized him. Only a few made room for him in their lives.



The House of Christmas
G.K. Chesterton, read by [Sarah Frase](#)

Engage:

Draw circles to represent the different roles in your life—family member, friend, employee, neighbor, church member, gym attender, etc. Begin to color in each circle. As you do, invite Jesus to be fully at home in each area of your life.

Week Four . Finding . Monday

Read: Luke 2:8-20

There was a blaze of light and then the horrible realization that they were looking at an angel. That couldn't be good. They certainly hadn't earned God's attention by their outstanding behavior. But then the angel said, "Good news...great joy...all people..."



While Shepherds Watched Their Sheep
[Andrew Peterson](#), 2004

Engage:

Meditate on the fact that, like the shepherds, we don't deserve God's good attention. Still, he invites us to find Jesus—at first in a manger, but one day on a throne. Praise God that his restoration plan is underway and that we're part of it!

Week Four . Finding . Tuesday

Read: 1 Peter 1:10-12

The angels had watched as Adam and Eve defied God and as centuries of humans repeated their rebellion. All the while, God sat patiently by. Why wasn't he punishing them? What did he mean by the prophecies of a child? Then, one night, it became clear.



Seeing Shepherds

copyright [Daniel Bonnell](http://www.BonnellArt.com), 2010, used with permission, www.BonnellArt.com

Engage:

Step into the painting above. What does it have to tell you? During Advent we focus on one of history's greatest moments of insight for both human and angles alike: finding God wrapped up in skin.



Week Four . Finding . Wednesday

Read: Luke 2:21-35

Simeon held the child in his arms. It was only a sneak peek of all God had promised, but it was enough. He had seen God's salvation breaking onto the horizon. Since Simeon the light has grown, but we still wait for the day when God's salvation will be complete.



January Hour - Epiphany

Makoto Fujimura, 1997-8, from *Images of Grace*, used with permission

Engage:

Simeon held the first phase of God's promises in his arms—all eight pounds of baby Jesus (give or take). What aspects of God's salvation do you hold in your arms? Freedom from guilt? Restored relationships? Love for others?...



Week Four . Finding . Thursday

Read: Luke 2:36-40

After a lifetime of waiting for God to fulfill his promises, Anna saw the promised child. She touched the skin of God and watched his lips move in and out as he slept. This was God's plan for saving and remaking the world, and it required skin.



by [Godfrey Rust](#), 1995, used with permission
read by [Dr. Reg Grant](#), Department Chair of [Media Arts & Worship](#), Dallas Theological Seminary

Engage:

Today, hold a baby or toddler on your lap. (If you can't find one, watch this [video](#), *but only as as a last resort*.) Take in their tininess. Observe their limitations. This was our God—100% genuine baby. Let yourself swim in the mystery of it.

Week Four . Finding . Friday

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

After the shepherds visited baby Jesus, more than a year would lapse before the Magi found him. Still, it makes sense to remember them together. Both searched for the child and when they found him, worshipped him as king.



Until Shiloh Comes

Grace Carol Bomer, 1993, used with permission

Engage:

The Magi worshipped the God-child with expensive gifts that would prove useful in financing Joseph and Mary's flight to Egypt. How can you worship God like the Magi did? Today or tomorrow, honor Jesus' birth by giving a gift to someone in need.



Week Four . Finding . Saturday

Read: Acts 17:24-31

For most of us, our Christmas celebrations are over. Mary & Joseph, the shepherds and angels, and the Magi all found Jesus. Now it's our turn. God has arranged our lives "so that [we] would seek him, and perhaps reach out for him and find him."



Born Again
[Josh Garrels](#), 2015

Engage:

The good news of Advent—that God has begun his plan to restore the world—is only good news if we've got a place on Jesus' team and let his work on the earth be logged as ours. So what about you—have you found Jesus? Or, rather, have you let him find you?

If you're intrigued by the idea of finding Jesus, I'd love to help you sort through what that means. You can drop me a note at shannon@faithandtheotherfive.com

Week Five . Expecting . Sunday

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

Christmas is past, but Advent isn't over. Now we wait expectantly for the second phase to begin—when Jesus returns to set things right. He will swallow up mortality in his life, transform brokenness into beauty, and replace sin with glory.



Nature and Grace

anthracite, mild steel, plate glass, resin, glass cloth, gold leaf (46.5" h, 13.6" w, 42.5" l)

[Ted Prescott](#), 1996-1997, used with permission

Engage:

God gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that Jesus will return. How do you see the Holy Spirit at work in yourself and others? Today, tell someone how you see the Holy Spirit alive in them and say, "Thanks for being living proof that Jesus is coming back."



Week Five . Expecting . Monday

Read: John 14:1-3

Jesus left this world to prepare a place for us—*another* place for us—one that overflows with more wonder and beauty than this world. It will be a place without any brokenness or evil—a world that is our home.



Evensong

[Nicora Gangi](#), 2011, used with permission

Engage:

Find a picture of the most beautiful place you've been. Remember what it was like to be there. Then, imagine what the new earth will be like—more fantastic, without any danger, pain, or brokenness. Praise Jesus for preparing a home for us.

Week Five . Expecting . Tuesday

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-10

We live between the nativity and Jesus' second return—a place where grief and joy live side by side. But, one day, Jesus will return and it will be all joy.



Joyful Joyful
[Jimmy Needham](#), 2014

Engage:

Enter into the joy of who Jesus is and that he is returning. Listen to the song again and offer your joy to Jesus by singing along, drawing, dancing, or praying.

Week Five . Expecting . Wednesday

Read: Revelation 5:1-14

God has a plan for bringing this world to an end and inaugurating the new one. It's written on a scroll and only one person can open it—the lion of Judah, the Root of David, the lamb that was slain, the baby that was once born in a manger.



He Who Was, Who Is, and Is to Come
Grace Carol Bomer, 1995, used with permission

Engage:

Meditate on the painting above. This is Jesus, the promised one, the one who will restore all things. In what ways is Jesus like a lamb? In what ways will he be like lion? Worship him, exploring these aspects of who he is.

Week Five . Expecting . Thursday

Read: Isaiah 25:6-8 & Revelation 21:1-4

Isaiah and John, living centuries apart, offer us the same vision of a new heaven and new earth. No tears. No death. No pain. A celebration. A feast. The best clothes, food, and aged wine. Our longings will be satisfied. Life, as it was meant to be, will begin.



Panicum: Polar Change
Gregory Euclide, used with permission

Engage:

Rework your drawings from "Groaning . Day 2." Draw five circles—one each for your friends or family, your work, your city, your country, and the world. In each circle, sketch a struggle experienced there, then sketch what will be in the new earth instead.

Week Five . Expecting . Friday

Read: Revelation 21:22-22:5

One day, God and the Lamb will open the doors to the new heaven and new earth. It might be tomorrow or in February or, maybe, in six (or six hundred) years, but that day *will* come—and our expectations will be exceeded for eternity.



Messiah: Hallelujah, by George Frideric Handel
Conducted by Sir Colin Davis with the London Symphony Orchestra and Tenebrae Choir

Engage:

Use your senses to explore the wonder, joy, and perfection of the new earth that Jesus is building for us. What might that joy taste like? What might that wonder smell like? What colors, textures, and sounds capture a bit of that perfection?

Week Five . Expecting . Saturday

Read: 2 Peter 3:8-14

While today marks the last Advent Meditation, our journey continues. We head into another January, waiting and hoping that this will be year that Jesus returns—the last year of doctor's appointments, car accidents, and funerals. Come, Lord Jesus!



The Resurrection of the Body

by Steve Scott
read by Joshua Morris

Listen

© by [Steve Scott](#), 1997, produced with permission.
Performed by [Joshua Morris](#).

Engage:

Listen to *The Resurrection of the Body* twice. Pay attention to how Scott focuses on things in our world to help us anticipate the next one. As you enter a new year, ask the Holy Spirit to help you make similar connections and anticipate God's New Earth.
