

Week One, *Behold the Savior*

How to Use This Guide:

You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. Advent is a season of spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas. The word "advent" comes from the Latin word "adventus," which means "coming." For Christians, this includes the coming of Christ at His birth and Christ's coming again as King at the end of the age.
2. Advent is a time for prayer, reflection, and good deeds. Christians are encouraged to pray for the grace to prepare for Jesus' coming, to reflect on the meaning of his birth, and to perform acts of kindness and charity. Historically, Christians come together to celebrate the season through special liturgies, shared meals, and acts of service.
3. Advent is a time for us to focus on the true meaning of Christmas - the love of God displayed in Christ coming into the world to save us from our sins, and to give us hope for the future.

Big Idea for Discussion: As the children of Israel waited expectantly for the promised Messiah, we wait expectantly for the coming of Christ and His Kingdom.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. Have you ever waited patiently (or impatiently!) for a gift?
 - a. What was the gift?
 - b. Was the gift promised to you, or did you ask for it and hope it would be given to you?
2. Have you ever given a gift that wasn't expected?

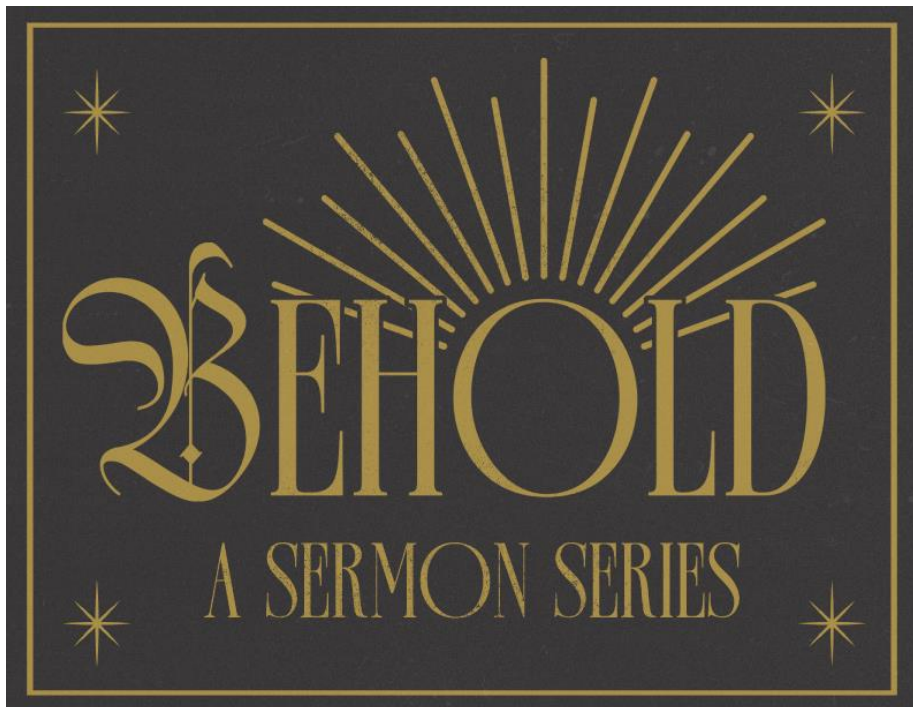
Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. The promise of a coming Messiah is seen all throughout the Hebrew Bible, starting in the earliest chapters of Genesis, and this promise is then woven into the story of Israel, culminating in the birth of Christ. One major text we will be looking at today is Isaiah 9:2-7.
2. Have someone in your group read Isaiah 9:2-7 slowly.
3. What is the significance of the contrast between darkness and light in Isaiah 9:2?
4. What are some of the titles given to the child in Isaiah 9:6? What do these titles tell us about his character and mission?
5. What does the phrase "of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" tell us about the kingdom that the child will establish?
6. How does Isaiah 9:2-7 connect to the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love that are associated with Advent?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. Isaiah 9:2-7 is a powerful passage of Scripture that offers a message of hope and promise for the world. It reminds us that God is always with us, even in the darkest of times, and that he has a plan for our salvation. This passage is a reminder that we should never give up hope, but should always rejoice in the knowledge that God is with us and that he will ultimately bring about his kingdom of righteousness and peace.
2. Righteousness, peace, and hope may be eternal realities for us, but it may not be our present experience. Christmas can be a difficult season for some, with people grieving the loss of loved ones over the past year, enduring financial difficulties, and a ramping of familial and relational issues.
3. This week we're going to take some time to give thanks for all God has done for us in the coming of the Son, and we're going to move into some ministry time for those who need encouragement, hope, and healing as we behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Move into ministry time (prayer model in the back of the booklet).



Week Two, *Behold the King*

How to Use This Guide:

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Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. Last week we began our time together discussing the meaning of Advent, the waiting and anticipation of a coming King. The Messiah was promised long before the birth of Christ, and the children of Israel were reminded about this Promised One by the prophets throughout the generations. However, over time, Israel developed expectations of what the coming of this Messiah would look like.
2. At a time when Israel had experienced military defeat after military defeat, and foreign occupation after foreign occupation, Israel was desperate for another warrior-king like David, i.e. someone who could overthrow Rome and restore the greatness of Israel and make it a major player on the world stage. Instead, they got a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laying in a dirty manger, who as he grew up eventually began preaching peace, mercy, justice, and love for enemies.

Big Idea for Discussion: Jesus Christ, the anticipated Messiah, arrived not as a fierce warrior but as an ordinary infant, exemplifying God's love and peace for all.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. Is there anything in your life that didn't go according to plan, but now you're thankful for that?
2. Have you ever been given something that was described to you one way, but after receiving it, found out it was something totally different?

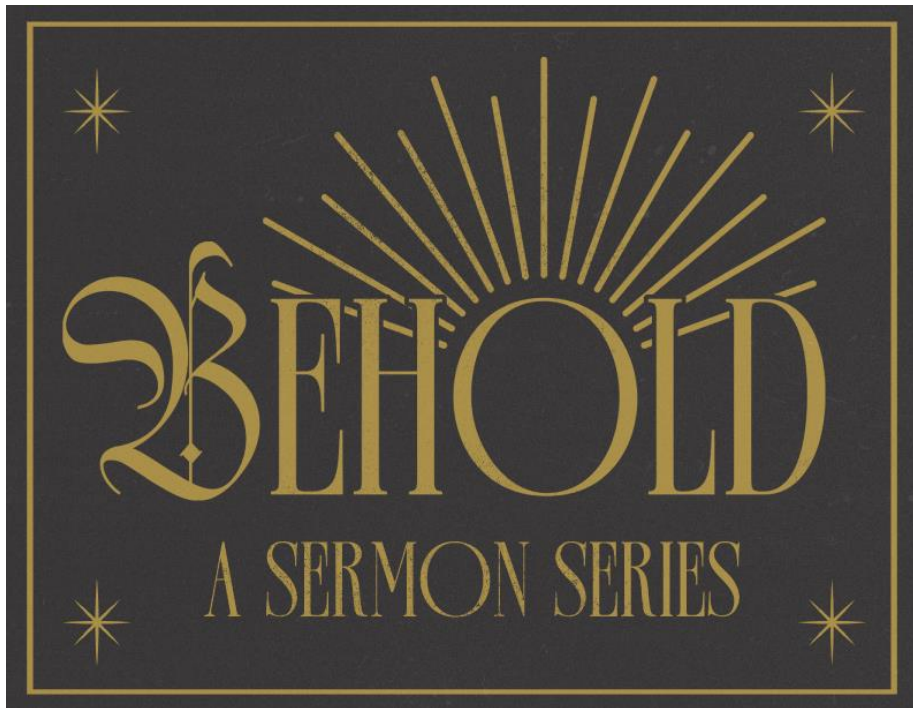
Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. Have someone in your group read Isaiah 9:2-7 and then Luke 1:5-56. Pay attention to what is being promised, the imagery being used, and anything else that may stand out to you.
2. Comparing the two texts, how did Jesus' advent differ from the expectations of Israelites living in the first century?
 - a. Comparing the two texts, can you see why they may have had different expectations for the arrival of the Messiah?
3. Is there any significance to the names and titles given to the Messiah in both passages?
 - a. Do you see one of these names or titles more present in the ministry of Jesus in the gospels?
 - b. Do you personally connect with any of these names or titles?
4. Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55), also known as the Magnificat, is a powerful expression of praise and gratitude for God's mercy and grace. How does Mary's song connect to the themes of Advent, particularly the themes of hope, expectation, and preparation for the arrival of the Messiah?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. In Christ's Kingdom peace and love reign. With the holidays coming up, there will be plenty of opportunity for you to exemplify this message of love and peace. What does peace and love reigning in your family look like? Setting personal expectations prior to family gatherings about your practice of the peace and love of Christ's presence or inviting the Holy Spirit to release peace, joy, and love in us are ways we can live under the rule and reign of Christ our King within our family.
2. We also want to keep in mind that the holidays bring up pain for some people, and the Holy Spirit wants to bring healing and peace to them in this season as we look forward to the coming of the King. Asking Jesus to lead us in love and to bring peace to one another is a means of Beholding His Kingdom.

Move into ministry time (prayer model in the back of the booklet).



Week Three, *Behold the Son of God*

How to Use This Guide:

You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. Over the last two weeks we have discussed the meaning and importance of Advent, as well as peace and love as central aspects of Christ's coming both in His birth and return. Today we are going to be talking about hope as another central aspect of the advent season, particularly from the perspective of Mary, the mother of Jesus.
2. As we've discussed, the Israelites had been expecting the arrival of the promised Messiah for thousands of years prior to the birth of Christ, but God subverted their expectations. Instead of the Messiah arriving in regalia with a sword and chariot as a warrior, he arrived in this world as an infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and was laid in a dirty manger. However, prior to his birth, a young woman named Mary is invited into God's plan to turn the world upside down.
3. Mary, as a descendant of David, would have known the promises of God to Israel regarding the Messiah, especially the promise of a son of David

that would sit on the throne of Israel forever. But now, this promise is going to be fulfilled.. But not yet. She would be the one to give birth to the promised King and wait for Him to grow up, knowing His destiny. Hope had been deferred for many generations, and now, things were changing.

Big Idea for Discussion: Just as Mary lived with hope during Jesus' anticipated birth, we too can find solace in the promise of his return, knowing that salvation awaits us.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. What would you say is the difference between hope and wishful thinking?
 - a. Does Proverbs 13:12 or Romans 8:24-25 change your opinion in any way?

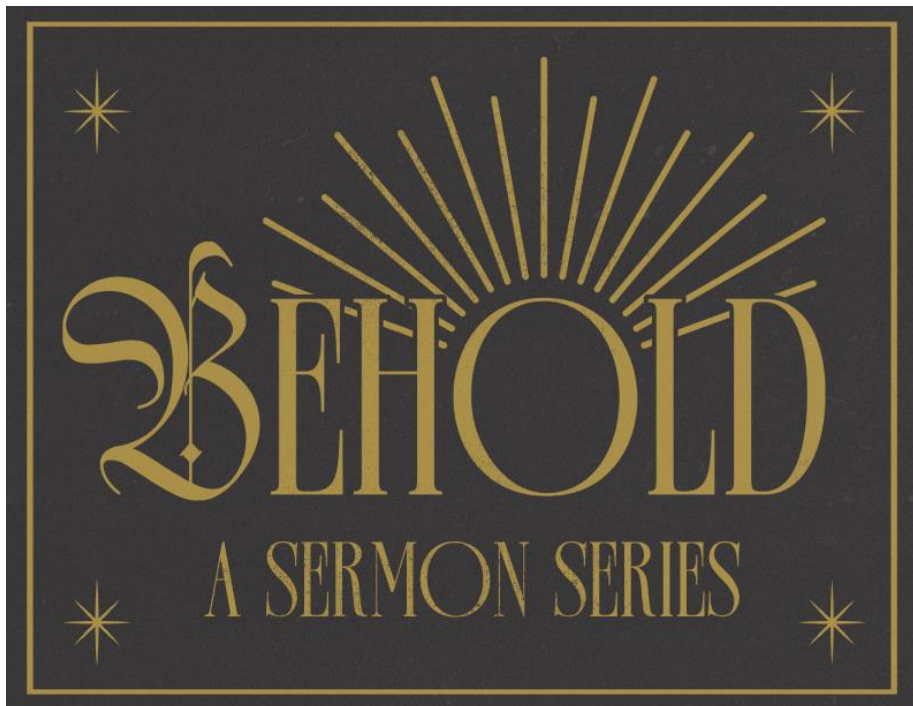
Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. Have someone in your group read Luke 1:26-35 slowly. Pay attention to Gabriel and Mary's language and any connection to other texts we've read in previous weeks.
2. How does the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary reflect the theme of hope?
3. What can we learn from Mary's response to Gabriel's message about preparing our hearts for Jesus' return?
4. How does the prophecy about Jesus' future reign as King connect with the Advent theme of anticipation?
 - a. How does it connect to first century Israel's anticipation, as well as our anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God.

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. There is a difference between wishful thinking and hope, and now, thanks to Jesus, hope looks different (Romans 8:24-25). Looking back, we see God's faithfulness throughout scripture and leading up to the arrival of His Son. Now, we look forward in hope to his Second Coming and all of the promises of His rule and reign.
2. Take some time as a group sharing what it is you're looking forward to in the fullness of Christ's Kingdom. Maybe it could be the resurrection when you're reunited with loved ones, or the renewal of creation and enjoying the world as it was designed to be. Invite one another to be specific about their hope of the Son of God's promise to "make all things new." Sharing and praying for our longings of renewal fosters a willingness to wait with a deeper expectation of hope.

Move into ministry time (prayer model in the back of the booklet).



Week Four, *Behold the Son of David*

How to Use This Guide:

You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. We have reached the final week of our study together. Many resources have been written on the topic of Advent, and a bible study on Advent could go on for months, if not years, if time were taken to focus on every aspect and theme. So far we have talked about the meaning and importance of Advent, and we've touched on several aspects such as peace, love, and hope. Today we will be focusing on the topic of joy, namely the great joy the world has experienced at the coming of Christ.

2. Joy is an interesting topic because it is something we can feel when something good happens, like the birth of a child or when we receive a gift, but it is also something that we can cultivate through spiritual disciplines. In the context of Advent, it is both/and. Christ's birth brought great joy to the world - covenant promises were fulfilled, people were saved, healed, delivered, and the dividing wall between Jew and gentile was removed. However, we are also commanded to rejoice throughout scripture. In fact, the

word "rejoice" appears over 300 times in scripture and passages such as Romans 12:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, and Philippians 4:4 encourage us to rejoice in every circumstance, including trials and tribulations.

Big Idea for Discussion: Jesus is the promised Son of David that brings joy to the world.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. When have you felt the most joy in your life?
 - a. Was it an event?
 - b. Was it a gift someone gave you?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. Have someone in your group read Isaiah 35 slowly, paying attention to the imagery being used.
2. Isaiah 35 paints a vivid picture of a transformed desert landscape, overflowing with life and joy.
 - a. What does this imagery suggest about the transformative power of God's presence in our lives?
 - b. How can we cultivate a sense of anticipation and hope for this transformation, even in the midst of challenging times?
3. Isaiah 35 speaks of a time when "the ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing" and "everlasting joy shall be upon their heads."
 - a. What does this vision of everlasting joy suggest about the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises?
 - b. How can we cultivate a sense of gratitude and hope for the blessings that await us in the future?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. To close out this week, we're going to cultivate some joy together in a fun and simple way. As a group select a story from the gospels, specifically of someone receiving healing and/or realizing that Jesus is the Son of God.
2. After selecting a story, have someone in the group read through it slowly. However, as someone reads through, encourage everyone present to close their eyes and envision themselves in the story as an Israelite hearing and seeing the ministry of Jesus for the first time. Knowing what you now know about the promised Son of David, what kinds of emotions would they have felt? What emotions do you feel?
3. Another way of cultivating joy is through gratitude. Take a few minutes together and share something you're thankful for.

Move into ministry time (prayer model in the back of the booklet).

Prayer Model

The Vineyard 5-Step Prayer Model is a framework for praying for others that is designed to be interactive and led by the Holy Spirit. It is not a formula or a magic incantation, but rather a way to approach prayer with intentionality and openness. The five steps are as follows:

1. **Interview:** Ask the person you are praying for to share their needs and concerns. Listen carefully and compassionately. It may be a physical sickness or pain, a need for direction for a big decision, a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit or other need. If they are asking for prayer with regard to pain or sickness, ask them where their pain level is on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being low and 10 being excruciating.

2. **Diagnosis:** As the person is talking, silently ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the root causes of the person's needs. This may be related to physical, emotional, spiritual, or relational issues.

3. **Prayer Selection:** With your understanding of the person's needs and the Holy Spirit's leading, move into a time of prayer by asking them if you can lay hands on them (on the affected area if appropriate, or have them place a hand on the area as you lay a hand on their shoulder). Prayers may include prayers for healing, forgiveness, deliverance, or guidance. **If you feel the person needs pastoral care for their issue, feel free to contact a VC pastor.**

4. **Prayer Engagement:** *First things first*, invite the Holy Spirit to come by praying "Come, Holy Spirit." *Second*, ask the Holy Spirit to release the Kingdom of God, and power for whatever is needed. If healing is needed, ask the Holy Spirit to release the Kingdom and the power to heal. If wisdom is needed, ask the Holy Spirit to release the Kingdom and wisdom. Pray with confidence and authority, believing that God is able to do anything, but fight the urge to get loud and talk the whole time - just continue to invite the Holy Spirit to move in power and to manifest His presence. *Third*, be aware of what you are sensing, feeling, and hearing - listen for guidance and insight from the Holy Spirit. Pray with your eyes open to pay attention to what the Spirit is doing! *Finally*, ask the person if they are sensing or feeling anything, or if the Holy Spirit is showing them or speaking to them about anything. This is an important aspect, because we want to partner with what the Holy Spirit is doing. If the person comes forward for prayer with regard to wisdom, but they begin to sense a burning or tingling in their body, it could be that the Holy Spirit is wanting to heal them instead.

5. **Follow-up:** After praying, usually no longer than 5-7 minutes depending on how many people you are praying for, ask the person how they are feeling. Encourage them to "test the pain," e.g. has the level of pain changed from 10 to 5? Has the pain increased or moved to another location? If the pain has moved or increased, it very well could be a spirit of infirmity that requires deliverance ministry and if you don't have training in that, it might be best to refer them to a VC pastor. Be sensitive to their needs and offer to pray for them again if you have time, or offer to pray for them at another date if time is limited.

Additional tips for using the Vineyard 5-Step Prayer Model:

- Be respectful of the person you are praying for and their privacy. If someone gets healed and you want to share the testimony, be sure to ask for their permission first. It may be helpful to change names for the sake of privacy.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help from other believers, especially those who have been praying for others in this manner longer and have more experience.
- Be patient and persistent. Learning to pray is a process, and it may take time to see results.