

OVERCOME

a guide for Advent



ad·vent

/'ad,vent/

noun

The arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.

The first season of the Christian church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays.

synonyms

arrival, appearance, emergence, materialization, occurrence, dawn, birth, rise, development

This guide was written and distributed by Redemption Church of Oklahoma City.
All scripture is quoted from the ESV Bible.

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of Oklahoma City

WHY SHOULD WE CELEBRATE ADVENT?

In a season that is busy with shopping, family, meals, decorating, and traveling, we often forget what all the busyness is about; or at least what it *should* be about. Observing the season of Advent is a way to interrupt the busyness and re-orient our hearts and minds toward the arrival of Jesus. Advent expands the Christmas celebration to include the four weeks prior to it. In doing so, our observance becomes a practice that can help aim our wandering hearts and quiet our busy souls as we reflect on the Christmas story. Advent helps us remember and dwell on what God has done for us in sending Christ. It's also a way for us to link arms with the generations that have gone before us, and experience their same anticipation as they eagerly awaited the coming Messiah who would take away the sin of the world. Lastly, it helps us to long and pray for the return of Jesus and his establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth. This will be our eternal dwelling place, filled with peace and light beyond imagination.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Our hope is that this guide will be a tool that helps you carve out some intentional time with God, friends, and family throughout the Christmas season. The guide is broken into four weeks. Each week includes a passage of scripture, a devotional, reflection questions, a prayer, songs, and activities. Before you get too busy, pick a day, time, and place that you can carve out 30 to 60 minutes to engage with the content each week leading up to Christmas. Invite a friend or neighbor to join you and talk through what you are learning. If you have children, consider making this a special weekly activity to build anticipation toward Christmas.

We have also put together additional resources at the end of this guide to aid you in worship during this season. The resources include books, free music downloads, and instructions on how to set up an advent wreath.

THIS YEAR'S THEME

John 1:5 says, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*" Many things in life are overwhelmingly dark. But Jesus has overcome the world in his life, death, and resurrection (John 16:33). Not only that, but the Bible also says that we have overcome the world: "*For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith.*" When we fully embrace who Jesus is, we find light in the darkness and we trade being overwhelmed by darkness with being overwhelmed by light. This Advent season we want to reflect on what it looks like for our lives to be overcome by the hope, joy, peace, and love found in the person of Christ.

Week 1

OVERCOME

by hope

"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

- Matthew 2:2

Light the First Candle
Read Matthew 2:1-12 - The Visit of the Wise Men (Magi)
Read the Devotional
Reflect

DEVOTIONAL BY AUDRA SWINDELL

We are people who long for things that we have yet to experience, but who nonetheless believe in their existence. In fact, the longing is itself a kind of hope. The coming of Christ is both a historical event and a present reality. Because we know he came, he walked, he redeemed in death, and ascended in glory, we know we can stake our hope on him. We know that longing for his coming is a good and right thing because we have both experienced it through his Story and because such a Story bears witness in our own lives.

Do you remember the time just before your heart and mind were brought together in a symphony of understanding, surrender, and hope? Do you remember what it was like to see and know such a gift was before you, but you had yet to take hold of it? I imagine the journey from Far East to Near East to be much like this. To be men whose lives were made up of enchantments, conjuring, and other-worldly pursuits, but who were given eyes to see the Star. No stranger to strange things, the men of magic from the East, set out to see who could conjure such a Star. Theirs was a journey fraught with persistence and wonder. We see them come so far, brought day after day, by a Star whose light does not diminish. We see them, men who do not yet know of the Truth that awaits them, overcome.

When you consider the journey of the Magi, do not ever forget to consider their most profound end. When these men who were no strangers to strange things beheld a child, they fell down and worshipped. We don't know if he looked different or if they sensed his difference, but we know that the star guided them to the exact location of the Savior. When they arrived at the home of the Savior, they were unmistakably in awe. They were overcome.

This is a season to revel in the coming of Promise, Truth, Light. This is a time to remember what it was like to see the Gift before you, but not yet in you. How much more do you love the Gift within you, now, because you know what it's like to be without it? How much more are you overcome by the hope, the longing, for something you've yet to experience because of the Truth that already abides in you? The Magi knew the wonder of supernatural things before they ever met the Savior, but only in following the Light and seeing him face to face did they fall down and worship. Only in the meeting did they comprehend the importance of the journey.

REFLECTIONS

Think of a time when you hoped for something far off and then it came to pass? How did this affect you? How did you feel? What was your response?

Now, think about a time when you hoped for something far off, but maybe it never came to pass. Maybe there is something you are currently hoping for. How does this affect you? How does it make you feel? What is your response?

PRAYER

God of hope, help us to see that you made our hearts to search and seek. Some things you allow us to find simply. Some things you help us to find in miraculous ways, and some things will never be found by us. Help us to rest in the perfect hope that is found only in the treasure of your Son, Jesus. May we seek Him above all else.

HYMNS & SONGS

O Come O Come Emmanuel
Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

ACTIVITY

Plan to go look at Christmas lights or see a Christmas performance one evening this week with your friends, your spouse, or your family. Use that time to consider what is one hope you have for this Christmas season. Ask your friends or family the same question.

The Chickasha Festival of Lights

2400 S. 9th Street, Chickasha, OK
Sunday -Thursday: 6pm - 10pm
Friday & Saturday: 6pm - 11pm

Automobile Alley Christmas Lights

Broadway Ave, NW 4th to 10th OKC, OK

The Boys Ranch Town Drive Through Christmas Pageant

5100 E. 33rd Street Edmond, OK 73013
December 7, 8, and 9th - 7-9PM

MAY YOU BE OVERCOME BY HOPE IN CHRIST

Week 2

OVERCOME

by joy

⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

-Luke 2:9-10

Light the First and Second Candles
Read Luke 2:8-20 - The Shepherds and Angels
Read the Devotional
Reflect

DEVOTIONAL BY CHRIS CLARK

Fear and joy – opposite ends of a spectrum collide in one of the most epic exclamations of praise captured in the pages of Scripture – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is well pleased.” Peace came to earth in the middle of the night – a bright light dispelling darkness. Jesus was born.

Joy's journey always passes through the landscape of peace. Yet the journey often involves experiencing joy's foe in the valley before arriving. Sometimes the road to finding peace and joy leads us through valleys of fear, suffering, chaos, toil, and strain. Anymore it seems as though we are a culture stuck in the valley grasping for peace and joy but always seeming to come up empty-handed; we hear the earth groaning as storms blow and fires rage, we see people hungry and hurting, governments struggle to find peaceful resolutions, sickness and disease never seem to let up, relationships are severed by sin, we have bottomless pits in our chests that never seem to be filled. The valley is a dark place to pass through, but did you catch that? We are meant to pass through it. The valley is not our home.

The shepherds knew the foe of peace as well; the long cold nights, keeping watch in their fields, heavy eyes and shivering bodies, ears on high alert for prey that prowls perimeters looking to pick off the flock, always waiting for the rising sun to offer warmth and safety again. The silence and darkness of the night can be a terrifying place. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the shepherds to be suddenly enveloped in light and to see an angel appearing before them in the night? Their hearts must have been beating out of their chests. Their fear was bracing for a collision.

The angel's first words were, “fear not” – immediate words of comfort slowing down the shepherd's racing hearts. Isn't it just like our God to speak in this way – when we are overcome with fear, he breaks in with words of comfort and peace. For the shepherds, the valley of the shadow had been overcome by light and fear had been overcome by peace. Yet the angel offers more – “good news of great joy!” A savior for all had been born. The son was indeed rising. As if one angel was not enough to convey this glorious news, a multitude of heavenly hosts joined in the song, “Glory to God in the Highest” and “Peace on Earth.” Fear and joy collide in this news.

The shepherds left their fields to go see this news first hand. Only

joy can elicit the kind of response where men drop everything to go participate in a worship service – joy that meets humanity in the valley of the shadow and moves them toward freedom; freedom from toil, freedom from fear and anxiety, freedom from darkness and depression, freedom from sin, freedom to worship, freedom to proclaim the good news, freedom to walk in peace and joy for all of eternity. Jesus is the light and life that brings joy to all men. This is why he came.

So maybe this Christmas you find yourself to be in the middle of a dark valley. Remember these angelic words, “fear not” and let the “good news of great joy” in Christ turn your fear into worship. Worship is the road that led the shepherds to Jesus and it’s the road that leads us to Him as well. What a wondrous miracle it is when fear collides with joy and we are delivered out of the valley.

REFLECTIONS

Think of a time in your life that felt like a dark night. Maybe life feels that way right now. Spend some time articulating the fears that come with a season of darkness. What if you committed to worship Jesus in the darkness? How might that bring joy?

PRAYER

God of Joy, You entered the world as a humble baby king to bring rescue to a lost and dying world. The shepherds were overcome with this "good news of great joy" and their fears were stilled as they traveled to worship Jesus. Often, our circumstances and fears distract us from worshiping our savior. Help us to fully embrace the joy found only in Jesus and his great rescue. And by your Spirit, may we worship with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind - reflecting joy, even in the darkness, as we fix our eyes on the Joy Giver, Jesus.

HYMNS & SONGS

Angels We Have Heard on High

Joy to the World

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night

ACTIVITY

Use common items to re-create the shepherd's story. Use cotton balls for sheep, toys for the shepherds, and paper cut outs for the angels. As you create the scene, you can highlight the surprise the shepherds felt because of the other-worldly visitors!

Leave up the display for the week as a reminder of the joy of the shepherds.

Create a shadow box of some of the items you think a shepherd would need.

Talk with your family about their favorite surprises. Ask them each to share a memory. Why was it their favorite? Do they think they were as excited as the shepherds? Why do they think the shepherds were so joyfully surprised?

MAY YOU BE OVERCOME BY JOY IN CHRIST

OVERCOME

by peace

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

-Luke 1:28-30

Light the First, Second, and Third Candles
Read Luke 1:26-38 - The Birth of Jesus Foretold (Mary)
Read the Devotional
Reflect

DEVOTIONAL BY EMERY CLARK

When our perfectly laid out plans become irreversibly interrupted, what are our options? How can we respond? How can we possibly move forward?

In the first chapter of Luke, we meet a young teenage girl with plans that are perfectly laid out before her. She's betrothed to a man named Joseph. She is a simple girl from a simple town, living a humble and quiet life. Was she sweeping the floor when it happened? Was she preparing a meal? Was she washing the dirty clothes? In the middle of the mundane, there was suddenly a piercing light, and an angel named Gabriel stood before her. The irreversible interruption.

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”

This... was not in the plan.

A few months prior to this shocking moment, this same angel had visited a man named Zechariah, an aged priest, as he was actually standing inside the temple of the Lord, next to the altar of incense. Gabriel told Zechariah about another miraculous conception- his own elderly wife, Elizabeth, who was barren, was to conceive and give birth to a son named John.

Also... very much not in the plan.

On one hand, we have an elderly, wise priest standing upon the most sacred ground on the entire planet earth. On the other hand, we have a young teenage girl, standing upon a humble dirt floor in a tiny town that held no significance whatsoever. Both are completely interrupted by God. How will they respond? What can we learn?

God, in His infinite wisdom, uses the weak to shame the strong. Zechariah, a priest, standing in the presence of God Himself, is overcome by fear asks God for a sign. He needs more proof before he will be willing to lay down his perfectly laid out life. Mary, the tender young girl, is overcome by peace and drops her perfectly laid out plans right down at God's feet. She needs no sign. She needs no proof. Yet in His great mercy, God gives her the very proofs she did not ask for. Her relative, Elizabeth, is in her sixth month of pregnancy and will also give birth to a son. Undeniable

proof of the new reality of her life.

Mary responds, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

She, not the priest, responds as a servant of the Lord. She, not the priest, lays her living sacrifice upon God’s altar- the very altar Zechariah had seen and used countless times. Her peace was not circumstantial. She knew what it would mean to be a pregnant woman out of wedlock in those days. Her very life was at stake, yet she laid it down because she trusted the One who interrupted it all. She was overcome by peace because she knew that nothing is impossible with the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

So how will we respond when we are interrupted by God? We may not see an angel surrounded in blinding light, but we are interrupted daily by the Holy Spirit if we tune our ears to hear Him. Will we respond with fear and demand more proofs when He asks us to lay down our plans? Or will we offer up the incense of our prayers, casting our anxieties and thanks upon Him while laying our plans down as a sacrifice? We are promised that if we do lay it all down, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard us as we follow Him. (Philippians 4:6-7) We will be overcome by peace. Peace that doesn’t make sense. And God will be glorified and honored through our irreversibly interrupted lives.

REFLECTIONS

Parents, ask your kids: What do you think Mary was doing when she encountered the Angel? Cooking? Eating? Gardening? Why do you think she was surprised? Would any of the news have made her sad? What part of the news made her so joyful?

Has God interrupted your plans lately? How so? Do you struggle to find peace in the midst of these unexpected changes? What would help you cling to the peace of Christ?

PRAYER

God of Peace, we confess that we have tried to make our own peace in the planning of our lives. Teach us to find peace in your plans. Help us to unwrap our hands from our ways and to hold them open to receive your ways. Your plans are perfect and in them we can dwell in peace. Thank you for sending Jesus and giving us your Spirit, the anchor of perfect peace in our hearts.

HYMNS & SONGS

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus
Hark the Herald Angels Sing

ACTIVITY

Create ornaments with promises of God pasted or written on the decoration.

Spend 1 minute in complete silence with your children. Ask them about their experience. Did they enjoy it? Was it peaceful? Was it weird? What did they think about? With older children, consider doing it twice. For the second time, instruct them to think about attributes (characteristics) of God.

MAY YOU BE OVERCOME BY PEACE IN CHRIST

Week 4

OVERCOME

by love

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

-Matthew 1:22-23

Light All Four Candles
Read Matthew 1:18-25 - The Birth of Jesus
Read the Devotional
Reflect

DEVOTIONAL BY JEFF LAWRENCE

Life hasn't always worked the way I expected. Much of the time, it's been harder than I thought it ought to be.

When I was younger, I had high hopes for the days ahead. Like most teenagers, I had dreams for accomplishments, relationships, family, fun. I was convinced that adulthood meant freedom to do as I wished and enjoy all I wanted.

As I walked into the adult years, I've realized that life works differently than youthful dreams and desires anticipate. Different doesn't mean bad. In most ways, it's actually better, deeper, and richer than the fantasies of freedom that excite a teenage boy. It just wasn't what I once expected.

When I read the adventures of the young Joseph and his girlfriend, Mary, I can't help but wonder about their dreams. Young love. Flirtatious glances. Growing friendship. Happy engagement. Honeymoon imaginations. Proud parents. Parties to celebrate the prince and his princess. Joy for their families and friends. Everything seemed perfectly planned.

And then the unexpected: "before they came together she was found to be with child."

All that had been happy now seemed to be undone in the worst possible way. Joseph was surely heartbroken, embarrassed, angry, and hurt all at once. But he was also kind and wanted to do the right thing, since Joseph genuinely cared about young Mary. The Bible says that he "resolved" to do the right thing, which means that it took some heart and guts to act with this kind of kindness in these kinds of circumstances. He would send her back to her family with as little embarrassment as possible, for both he and his fiancé.

But then, a second surprise.

"As he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"

This revelation, of course, would be entirely beyond investigation, completely unprovable. No DNA test was available to reveal the

truth beyond a reasonable doubt. This would require a faith that would belong to Joseph alone. This would require the most vulnerable type of trust both in his God and in his future wife. I cannot imagine a more intimate moment in the universe than the young man approaching the young woman to say, “Mary, I know. Now, I know. I believe you. God showed me that it is so.”

Many centuries later, we are also told to take this on faith because “the Bible tells us so.” Maybe you find it hard to believe. Maybe you still have questions. I imagine that Joseph did too. Yet, when Joseph woke up, he trusted the message God had sent him. He took Mary as his wife. She gave birth to a son. Joseph did as God had commanded him and called his name Jesus, just as he was told.

Whatever Joseph understood in those moments, the truth was certainly far more wonderful than he or anyone else could have comprehended. His infant son was the eternal Son of God. His son — his Jesus — was the long-awaited God-sent solution to save the world from sin and suffering.

Our passage begins, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.” This was surely an unexpected entrance for the birth of our Savior and Lord, our Rescuer and King. What a surprise for us all, except for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit — Three in One. None but God alone could have planned to surprise us all with the gift of grace in Jesus, the most unexpected gift of all.

REFLECTIONS

Think about a time in your life when the completely unexpected interrupted your daily routine. How did this make you feel? How did you respond?

Put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a minute. He had to place more trust and faith in the words of God delivered to him in a dream than what any person may think or say about him or Mary. What a courageous thing it is to trust the unseen more than what is seen. How might God be calling you to live out this kind of faith and love for him in this season?

PRAYER

God of great love, we often value the thoughts and words of men over your perfect thoughts and words of love. Often, we have let fear and anxiety lead our lives. But you always have a plan, revealed to us in your perfect timing. A love more lavish than we could ever imagine. Christ was, and is, and is to come; your perfect love plan for a weary world. Help us to wait with courage. Help us to receive your love. Help us to surprise others with love.

HYMNS & SONGS

O Holy Night
Silent Night

ACTIVITY

During this final week of Advent, plan one night to eat dinner with your family or friends. Over dinner, share about how you have experienced love from them. Tell a story of a time when their actions communicated love to you.

Then discuss what are some ways you could, together, love someone else. A neighbor, a family member, or a stranger. This could be something as simple as baking cookies and delivering them with a note, making a handmade gift or ornament for someone, buying someone else dinner, or purchasing a gift for someone. Be creative. It doesn't have to be big or complicated.

As you love others this week, consider how much more God has shown his love for you through Jesus.

Afterwards, discuss how loving others affected you. Did you reflect upon how God loves you? Did it stir your heart more for Jesus? Was it difficult or challenging?

MAY YOU BE OVERCOME BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST

ADDITIONAL ADVENT RESOURCES

BOOKS

FOR ANYONE

[Behold The Lamb of God: Russ Ramsey](#)
[The Advent of the Lamb of God: Russ Ramsey](#)
[Come Let Us Adore Him: Paul David Tripp](#)

FOR CHILDREN

[The Littlest Watchman: Scott James](#)

FOR ADULTS

[He Reads Truth: Advent 2018 Legacy Book](#)
[She Reads Truth: Advent 2018 Study Book](#)

MUSIC

SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

Search for [redemptionchurch](#)
[Overcome - Songs of Advent](#)

ITUNES

[Behold the Lamb of God: Andrew Peterson](#)

ADVENT WREATH HOW-TO GUIDE:

- 1) Gather four candles of your choice (any kind will do).
- 2) Place them in a line or circle on a surface that won't be damaged by wax.
- 3) Optional: Spruce it up with some holly, ribbon, or winter greenery.

Light a candle each week during your time of reflection. Each week is meant to build toward the next, until all four candles are lit during your Advent reflection time.

Parents, kids love lighting the candles! Help them understand anticipation, excitement, joy, and longing as they light each candle.

Merry Christmas Redemption Church. We love you more than you know. We hope this Advent Guide has served you well. May the peace, joy, hope, and love of our Lord Jesus fill your hearts this Christmas.