

# Small Group Questions

*Small groups and individuals can use these questions to engage the content of Sunday sermons.*



**November 27–December 25, 2022**

## Let's Sing While We Wait

Advent is a time of childlike anticipation and, often, impatience. During the four weeks before Christmas, we recall the world's yearning for a savior and look forward to celebrating Christ's coming. But even as we try to quiet our hearts, we often find ourselves distracted and frenzied as we are swept up in the busiest season of the year. Happily, God shakes us from our preoccupations and invites us to be still and wait in prayer and song.

*This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. – Isaiah 25:9*

**First Week in Advent: November 27, 2022**

**Singing with God's People**

**Psalm 122**

### Connect:

How do you define home? A house, a region or city, a relationship? Recall a treasured memory when you returned "home."

### Engage:

For the ancient Israelites, Jerusalem was considered the originating point of creation, the location where God chose to dwell, and the seat of God's justice. Our waiting in Advent anticipates the return of all humanity to our spiritual Jerusalem, our "home" in God.

Read Psalm 122

1. Pilgrims plodded through deserts, crossed over rivers, and climbed mountains to get to Jerusalem for the Holy Feast Days. After such an arduous journey, what do you imagine they felt when they first caught sight of the Holy City of Jerusalem?
2. Pilgrimage and worship in ancient times were always communal. How do you think giving thanks as a community impacts our ability to give thanks individually?
3. For the Psalmist, worship not only "rights" our relationship with God but also plays a role in "righting" our relationships with each other. How do you think worship and justice are related?
4. Praying for peace is a common refrain in our faith. How does seeking peace impact those who we don't know, those who are close to us, and, ultimately, seek the good of God's kingdom here on earth?

### Apply

Ancient Jews made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem several times a year to celebrate God's faithfulness in the past and their hope for God's provision in the future. This song is one of the "songs of ascent" that the pilgrims sang as they approached their beloved capital city: a place where they could encounter God's presence and trust in God's justice.

When you are exhausted and spent, what aspects of your faith "fill you up" and renew your soul?

### Pray

Share joys and concerns and pray for one another, the church, and the world.

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**Second Week in Advent: December 4, 2022**

**New Life Sings from an Old Stump**

**Isaiah 11:1-10**

### Connect:

Close your eyes and imagine how we could be a "perfect" community, nation, and world. Describe how it would be different from the world we experience now. Name at least three things that would need to change.

### Engage:

In Isaiah's time, Israel was marked by political, moral, and spiritual corruption, tribal infighting, and the threat of losing national autonomy. The "stump" refers to the Davidic royal dynasty, believed to be the carrier of God's goodness and faithfulness. Even though that "stump" was rotten and effectively dead, the promise is that a new shoot will emerge and facilitate a new future.

Read Isaiah 11:1-10

1. This new "shoot" or king is a remarkable contrast to the inept and corrupt leadership Israel is experiencing. Describe this leader's character, values, and use of power. How do you see these characteristics in the life and teaching of Jesus?
2. The poet describes the kingdom in idyllic terms. What is Isaiah trying to convey about God's kingdom? How does his vision square with Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven?
3. In light of our current political and religious divisions, how does this text about the promised Messianic king give us hope? How should following Jesus facilitate God's vision for this peaceable kingdom?

### Apply

Out of national despair and humiliation, Isaiah prophesized that Israel, envisioned here as a dead political tree stump, will produce a king who will usher in a peaceable and just kingdom where all creation relates harmoniously.

What can you do this week to act more like a member of the peaceable kingdom among your family and friends?

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**Third Week in Advent: December 11, 2022**

**The Song of the Unexpected Kingdom**

**Isaiah 35:1-10**

### Connect:

After the dreariness of winter, what signs of spring bring you the most joy?

### Engage:

Isaiah 35:4 is the central affirmation he wants us to hear: "Be strong and do not fear. God will come and save you!" All creation shall be restored (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6b-7) and humanity will be healed (Isaiah 35: 3, 5-6a)!

Read Isaiah 35:1-10

1. Isaiah depicts God's saving action as coming with vengeance and terrible recompense (Isaiah 35:4). Why must vengeance and recompense be the precursor to the restoration of creation and the healing of humanity?
2. The biblical images of the kingdom almost always involve a return to "the way things were meant to be:" a revitalization of God's vision for creation found in Genesis chapters 1-2. Leaving the creationism debate aside, what appeals to you about the description of our relationship with God and each other?
3. Restoration and healing will lead to glorious and joyful worship. Where do you find glimpses of this Holy Highway in your life?

### Apply

This song of hope depicts a new world order where God's people will thrive and worship with joy and freedom. As you reread the text for today, what verse stands out to you as a promise of hope? Why?

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**Fourth Week in Advent: December 18, 2022**

**Singing When All Looks Bleak**

**Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19**

### Connect:

What was your most happy Christmas celebration? Your most painful?

### Engage:

All of us go through seasons of suffering and pain and like us, the ancient Israelites had seasons where they wondered if God was punishing them. This Psalm demands that God see their plight and give them a sign of hope so that they might fully turn back and put their trust in the Lord.

Read Psalm 80:1-19 (Although the preaching text is shorter, for your study, read the entire section\_

1. The Psalmist gives us several images of God in the opening verse: a protective shepherd, a mystical being enthroned in the heavens, and a mighty warrior to rescue them. Yet, on the other hand, God has caused their suffering and humiliation. How do you think the Psalmist can hold these seemingly conflicting views of God?
2. In their suffering, the poet demands that God remember how God had previously cared for them. In your religious formation, were you permitted to be confrontational with God?
3. How does this well-used metaphor of God as a farmer and Israel as a vine resonate with you? How could this imagery help reconcile God as protector and punisher found in the opening verses?
4. Israel demands a sign by way of the "one who sits at your right hand," an apparent reference to the messianic king. When we are suffering, how does Jesus show us how to turn our hearts back toward God, bring new life and hope, and ultimately make God's face shine upon us?

### Apply

Advent reminds us that we are ultimately helpless and in need. Vulnerable to internal and external forces that may impede our happiness and existence, we stand before God and cry, "O God, help!"

What struggles are you contending with this Christmas? How can you be more honest with God? Is there a step of faith you need to take to see Christ more clearly as God's sign of hope?

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**Christmas Day: December 25, 2022**

**All Creation Sing, "Glory"**

**Luke 2:1-20**

### Connect:

With the shepherds, angels, wise men, and, of course, Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, the Christmas story is well-known to Christians. Who is your favorite character in the story?

### Engage:

Read Luke 2:1-20

1. Why does Luke go to so much trouble to ensure his readers know that Jesus is a descendant of David? Why do you think it was vital that he was born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2)?
2. Divine messengers play many pivotal roles in this story. Why do you think angels were sent to shepherds and not the ruling king of the day?
3. Put yourself in the story. How would you have felt if you had been one of the shepherds that night? How do you think you would have responded?
4. How do you think Mary and Joseph reacted when the shepherds arrived and told their tale?

### Apply

There are no more significant events in human history than the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus began his life, as we all have, through the miracle of birth.

How can the helplessness of baby Jesus provide insight into the vulnerability of God, who became one of us?

### Pray

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