



# Expectations of ADVENT

A 4-Week Bible Study for Advent

Creative  
Communications  
Sample



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## INTRODUCTION

We expect a lot out of Christmas. We like every year to be just like last year and the year before that. The decorations must be exactly right, with ornaments and tinsel and lights as they have always been placed. There are the usual holiday parties and the tradition of Christmas caroling. And the gifts! Children especially expect a lot out of Christmas. They know what kind of toys (and what kind of technology) they want to find under the tree! Yet we are often disappointed, and find ourselves a little bit sad this time of year. Things really are never quite the same. We don't always get what we want. Certain loved ones are missing now from the parties and dinners and caroling. The decorations just do not seem as bright as they were last year.

Unlike our own traditions, our God does not disappoint us, not this year or any year to come. He always comes through on his promises. On the first Christmas he gave us a Gift we could never have expected—even though he had been telling his people about this expected Gift for a very long time. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of God's Gift, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we say with the apostle Paul: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15)

## TIPS FOR USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand each of them with prayer concerns from the group.
2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.
3. You will need Bibles to look up the verses listed in each session.
4. As you work through the material in this study guide, be sure to write down in the margins any questions that come to mind or any thoughts that arise in the course of the discussion and your contemplation of each session's Scripture verses.
5. Throughout each session, think about specific ways you can apply the themes of the study to your life. The section entitled "Discussion" will help you focus your reflections on this.
6. If you are using this guide in a group setting, consider assigning Bible verses to various people in the class to read aloud at the appropriate time. This will move the session along more efficiently.

Note that some of the questions ask for facts. Typically, the answers to these questions will come from the Scripture verses just read. Other questions are more subjective, asking for your opinion or an example from your own experience. Since your life experiences are different from anyone else's, answers to these questions are neither right nor wrong. A Leader's Guide that accompanies this material is available from Creative Communications for the Parish (Code EXLG).

## SESSION 1: TRADITIONS

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.*

*1 Corinthians 15:3*



### OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, although things do not always turn out the way we want them to, and our own traditions often disappoint us, your promises never fail us. You promised to send a Savior to us and when the time was right, your Son was born among us to save us. Help us to be faithful as we share with others the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus. Hear our prayer in his name. Amen.

# DISCUSSION

Describe a Christmas tradition from your childhood or a tradition that is important for your family now.

# INTRODUCTION

We are easily disappointed at Christmas if our expected traditions are not in place. We like to have everything just so, like all the previous years (at least that is how we imagine those years to have been). New practices will find their way in and eventually mingle with the old ways, but it takes time to adjust to new ideas.

There was a tradition in Israel, among the people of God. They had expectations too, of the long-promised Messiah, God's Anointed One. But when the Messiah, the Christ, finally came, he was not exactly what they expected. In fact, the Promised One fulfilled or overturned a great many traditions—and in time, his followers would actually be accused of turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

# EXPECTATIONS

1. Throughout the centuries, God repeated his promise to send a Savior. We have often read those promises in the words of the prophets, and we have seen those promises fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord. Those same promises may not have been so clear to the people of Israel who first heard the prophets' proclamations. They awaited the Messiah—God's Anointed One—but what kind of Messiah were they expecting? **Read Genesis 3:15, Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Isaiah 9:6-7 and Daniel 7:13-14.** According to these passages, what kind of Messiah might the people of Israel have expected?
2. **Read Luke 1:26-38.** With the announcement of the angel Gabriel, the virgin Mary learned that she would soon be expecting a miraculous child. Based on the angel's words, what would Mary have expected concerning the child to come? What was unexpected about the two children described by the angel?

3. During his earthly ministry, Jesus did things that were often unexpected and people did not quite know what to think of him. Some people hated him and plotted to destroy him. Others believed, and still others were not quite so sure. **Read Matthew 16:13-14, Luke 3:23, Matthew 13:55, John 7:26 and John 12:34.** What do people think about Jesus? What questions do they ask about him? What expectations do they have of the Messiah?

## EXPECTATIONS FULFILLED

1. **Read 2 Corinthians 1:18-22.** We know that God kept his promise to send the Savior. What does it mean to have all the promises of God find their “Yes” in Jesus? Share some of God’s promises that are answered “Yes” in Christ.
2. Review each of the Bible passages in the first question of the above “Expectations” section. How did Jesus fulfill what the prophets said about him?
3. The tradition of the Passover meal began among the people of Israel when they were set free from slavery in Egypt. **Read Exodus 12:1-14 and 24-27.** Why did God give his people this tradition to follow? **Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.** How did Jesus fulfill the Passover tradition?
4. The people of Israel came to the tent of meeting in the wilderness, and later to the temple in Jerusalem, to worship. **Read John 2:13-22, John 4:21-24 and Matthew 12:6-8.** What did Jesus tell his followers about the temple?

## HANDED DOWN

1. Our English word “tradition” comes from the Latin word *tradere*, to hand over or to hand down (the word “traitor” comes from the same roots, referring to those who handed over sacred documents or secrets to their enemies). **Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11.** What tradition of faith did the apostle Paul hand down, or deliver, to the believers in Corinth, and to us?
2. **Read 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and 2 Timothy 2:1-2.** What had the young pastor Timothy received from Paul? What was he, in turn, to do with what he received? How is this kind of “handing down” accomplished in the wider church today? How is “the pattern of sound words” handed on in your life and in your own congregation?
3. **Read Psalm 71.** What is our prayer in this psalm about handing down traditions? We may be disappointed when some of our usual traditions are not fulfilled, but each year we may develop new traditions. Think of the past Advent and Christmas traditions that you observe or new traditions that you plan to begin. Which of these various traditions celebrate the season by handing down the good news of Jesus?



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We expect a lot out of Christmas. We like every year to be just like last year and the year before that, but sometimes things just don't turn out like we hoped. Unlike our own traditions, our God does not disappoint us. He always comes through on his promises. On the first Christmas God gave us a Gift we could never have expected—a gift we did not deserve—the gift of his own Son. In this 4 session Bible study, we will examine our own expectations and learn about God's unexpected gift for us, the holy Child of Bethlehem!

