

IN THOSE DAYS

ADVENT
AND CHRISTMAS



A 4 SESSION **BIBLE STUDY**
FOR ADVENT

**Creative
Communications
Sample**

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Introduction

“Once upon a time.” Those are the words that set the stage for so many familiar fairy tales. The opening lines of a contemporary science fiction tale might be even more well known in our day: “A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.” The account of Jesus’ birth is no fairy tale or imaginative movie script. His birth took place in real time, in real human history, when the ruler of the Roman empire, Caesar Augustus, issued a decree for a census to take place “in those days.” A long time ago, in a garden far, far away, God promised to send the woman’s offspring to destroy the tempting serpent that had brought sin and ruin to paradise. That’s no fairy tale either. Centuries later, in those days of Caesar Augustus, the time was fulfilled, the promise kept.

SESSION 1

A Decree Went Out

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. LUKE 2:1



OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in Eden you promised to send a Savior, a Helper, the offspring of the woman, to crush the serpent's head. Your plan and promise unfolded through human history until the time had fully come. Through an emperor's decree, you arranged for the Savior to be born in Bethlehem, as the prophet had foretold. Help us to trust the plans you have for us, and the promise of eternal life that is ours through Christ our Savior, the holy Child of Bethlehem. Hear our prayer in his name. Amen.

DISCUSSION

When do you begin your Christmas planning and decorating?

INTRODUCTION

Department stores start setting up their Christmas decorations in September, or perhaps even in August. You may have been planning for Christmas, too, long before the Advent season as you prepared to receive guests or made travel arrangements. Then during Advent, the decorating, shopping and baking may shift into high gear—all to celebrate the birth of the holy Child of Bethlehem, our Savior Jesus Christ. We may plan ahead for our celebration, but God’s plan for our salvation was in place long before the bright star shone over Bethlehem. His plan was made, in fact, before the stars were created.

A PLACE IN HISTORY

1. **Read Luke 1:1-4.** What reason does Luke give for compiling his account of Jesus’ life? What does Luke say about those who first told the story of Jesus? What does Luke say about his own credentials as the historian for these events? **Read Luke 2:1-2.** What information anchors Jesus’ birth in human history? Why would Luke include that historical information in his account? Augustus was called “Lord.” With this historical background, how does God demonstrate his lordship over Caesar?
2. **Read Luke 3:1-3.** Who is ruling Israel as John begins his ministry of preparing the way of the Lord? What parts will some of these figures play in the lives of John and Jesus?
3. **Read Hebrews 1:1-4.** Luke began the story of Jesus’ birth with the words “in those days.” Now the phrase is “in these last days.” What has happened to bring about the “last days”? Some people

believe that Jesus was only a prophet. What do these verses say in opposition to such a belief? According to these verses, who is Jesus?

BEFORE HISTORY BEGINS

1. **Read 1 Peter 1:17-21.** Peter writes to scattered Jewish believers. What were the “futile ways inherited” from their fathers? With what “futile ways” do we attempt to save ourselves? When was the Lamb of God known?
2. **Read Ephesians 1:3-10.** When did God choose us in Christ? What does it mean to you to be chosen by God in this way? What does such choosing say to those who feel that they must earn their salvation in some way? What is God’s plan for the fullness of time? What do we have in Christ?
3. **Read John 1:1-14.** What do these verses say about Christ the Word and his existence before time began? How will he be received among his people? What does he give to those who do receive him?
4. **Read 1 Corinthians 2:7-10.** What was God’s wisdom “decreed before the ages”? How has this been revealed to us? Why is this wisdom so impossible to grasp?
5. **Read Genesis 3:14-15.** Caesar Augustus issued a decree that sent Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. After the fall into sin, what did God decree in Eden concerning the serpent and the woman’s offspring?

YET TO COME

1. **Read Mark 1:14-15.** As Jesus began his public ministry, what was his decree or proclamation? What was the time that was fulfilled?
2. **Read Revelation 1:4-8.** What does Jesus mean in calling himself the Alpha and the Omega and the one “who is and who was and who is to come”?
3. **Read Revelation 21:1-6 and Revelation 22:20-21.** What decree does God make in these verses? What is meant by the announcement, “It is done!”? What is the Lord’s promise to us, a promise especially meaningful during this Advent season?
4. **Read Matthew 28:16-20.** What are we to be doing as we await our Lord’s return, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus”? Augustus ruled an empire conquered and held by military might. How will the reign of Jesus be spread throughout the world? In what ways do you play a part in the spread of his reign?

HEBREWS 1:1-3

- Long ago, at many times and in many ways,*
- God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,**
- But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,*
- Whom he appointed the heir of all things,**
- Through whom also he created the world.*
- He is the radiance of the glory of God**
- And the exact imprint of his nature,*
- And he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**

HYMN

(Tune: Divinum Mysterium 87 87 877)

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He the Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see.
Evermore and evermore.

This is he whom seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word.
Now he shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus our Savior, we confess you as Lord. Through your death and resurrection you conquered sin, death and the devil and rule in majesty over all things. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to you. Reign as Lord and King in our lives, during this Advent season and always, until we stand before your throne and praise you for all eternity. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

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MAKE A PLAN

As you make plans for Christmas, include a plan to help and serve others. For example, donate canned goods to a food bank, toys to families in need or join in Christmas caroling at a nursing home or in your neighborhood. Make plans in the name of Jesus, who fulfilled God's plan to save us.

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A 4 SESSION **BIBLE STUDY** FOR ADVENT



“Once upon a time” are the words that set the stage for many familiar fairy tales. The account of Jesus’ birth is no fairy tale. In this Bible study for Advent, participants will see that Jesus’ birth took place in real time, in real human history. A long time ago, in a garden far, far away, God promised to send the offspring of the woman to destroy the tempting serpent who brought sin and ruin to paradise. Centuries later, in those days of Caesar Augustus, the time was fulfilled, the promise kept.

