



GOD WITH US

AN ADVENT JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE

SERIES INTRODUCTION

(Taken from Week 1 Sermon Introduction.)

Advent means 'arrival.' It is a season of waiting, where Christians around the world anticipate the arrival of Jesus' birth at Christmas. But while the culture around us rushes ahead to the celebration, we intentionally join in the practice of waiting, retracing our steps in the great Story, remembering how humanity longed for the hope of Immanuel, God with us.

During this Advent, we will retrace those steps all the way back to the beginning, because the whole story of Scripture has been pointing ahead to the hope of Jesus. Here is where we are headed...

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes 5 core Covenants with His people:

- 1. Adam & Eve***
- 2. Noah & Family***
- 3. Abraham & Sarah***
- 4. Moses & Israel***
- 5. David & The Kingdom***

They are more than marks on a timeline of chronological events. They are an outline of salvation history, fulfilled and completed in Jesus. Together, they give us a framework for understanding the (often confusing) Old Testament. But even more, they prepare us for experiencing the pinnacle of human history, the Advent arrival of Jesus. Without them, we can't see the whole picture. Through these covenants, we will watch a deeper understanding of Jesus' Advent arrival come into view.





GOD WITH US:
An Advent Journey through the Story of Scripture

Week 1:
The Hope for Creation

Advent Candle:
Hope

Purpose:
From the start of the story, JESUS has been the long awaited hope for Creation.

Scripture Focus:
Genesis 1:1-2; 26-27

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

***So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.***





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Sermon Introduction:

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During this Advent, we will retrace those steps all the way back to the beginning, because the whole story of Scripture has been pointing ahead to the hope of Jesus. Here is where we are headed:

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes 5 core Covenants with His people. They are more than marks on a timeline of chronological events. They are an outline of salvation history, fulfilled and completed in Jesus. Together, they give us a framework for understanding the (often confusing) Old Testament. But even more, they prepare us for experiencing the pinnacle of human history, the Advent arrival of Jesus. Today, we start with the Creation Covenant God made with Adam and Eve, and restored with Noah.

Advent reminds us that in the waiting, there is Hope. On this first Sunday of this season, we light the Hope candle together and remember that in every place where we have failed, God has been faithful. All the way back in the garden, he planted a seed of Hope that continues to bear fruit through the grace of Jesus.



Sermon Outline

1. The Covenant of Creation

The preacher, pastor, and writer Fleming Rutledge often says, “Advent begins in the dark.” Though Christmas is called the season of lights, we remember that the story starts in darkness, longing for the light to come. In fact, the whole scope of Scripture begins this way as well. (Note to preachers: Notice the way that the Advent wreath was without light, until the spark of the Hope candle. Explore the possible connections to be made in this visible illustration.)

Genesis 1 opens with an image of chaos. Darkness, void, the Spirit hovering over the waters. Yet out of that chaos, God brings Creation. The first chapter of the Bible describes in poetic beauty the work of his Creation. And the pinnacle of his work comes in verses 26 and 27, the forming of humanity in the image of God. All of Creation bears his glory. But only humanity bears his image. With that privilege comes a mission.

God roots Adam and Eve in his garden, as his representatives, entering into a covenant partnership with them. He will be our God, we will be his people. And this covenant involves a commitment on our part to embody his character, his will, his way of being in the world.

In each of the covenant stories we will explore, we’ll see how God does this over and over again. He chooses a person or people to be his representative for the rest of humanity. The promise is not only for them or to them, but will be accomplished through them.





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2. The Fall of Creation

Genesis 1 gives us more than an origin story, it gives us an identity story. It reveals who we were designed to be and how we were created to live. This 'image of God, beloved by God' identity is the first truth about us. Yet, by the time we get to Genesis 3, we have already failed in the mission and covenant. Serving as his image bearing, covenant keeping representative was not enough. We were tempted to grasp after equality with him. And humanity fell into sin, dragging all of Creation down with us. We shattered our covenant with God. But he will never break his covenant with us. Even in our failure, he is faithful. Though we were broken by the wound of sin, God promised healing and restoration would one day come. So humanity waited. And humanity hoped.

But hope seemed hard to come by. The fall of Genesis 3 spirals into the far reaching devastation of sin. By the time we get to the second generation, one brother murdered another. And the collapse continues until Genesis 6:5 records, "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." Every inclination. Only evil. All the time. And the result is the Creation coming undone. In Genesis 1 God brings Creation out of chaos. In Genesis 6, Creation collapses back into chaos again as the Flood waters are unleashed over the earth. (Note to preachers: Examine the connection between the 'water' imagery of Genesis 1 and 6.)



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3. The Hope of Creation

The story seems to have come apart before it even had a chance to start. But again, God shows his covenant love to humanity and chooses another representative. Like Adam and Eve, God selects Noah and enters into a covenant with him, on behalf of all of us. He raises up Noah to proclaim the rescue of grace, even in the throes of judgment. And on the other side of the rising waters and the ark of hope, God makes a covenant (Genesis 9) that echoes Eden, a promise of hope for all of Creation. Bringing all of the storylines together, what is the first thing Noah does after leaving the ark? He plants a vineyard. A reminder of the garden blooming again.

Of course, that is not the only similarity between the stories. Once again, sin breaks relationships, the curse creeps in, and the downward spiral continues on. And once again, God plants a seed of hope and we reap the harvest of redemption.

As we make our journey around the Advent wreath and into this season of waiting, we see that the story begins in the dark. But the light pierces that darkness with hope. Adam and Eve, Noah and his family, are chosen as representatives of God's covenant with humanity. Even though they fail in their covenant mission, God is still faithful to his.

Genesis 1-3 reminds us that what went wrong in the garden is set right through Jesus.

Genesis 6-9 reminds us that even though sin is judged, grace provides the rescue. And the ultimate fulfillment of this is found in Jesus, who takes upon himself the judgment of sin and becomes the embodiment of our rescue on the cross.



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From the start of the story, he has been our long awaited hope. As we continue in this Advent journey, we remember that he is the fulfillment of every covenant and the Hope for Creation.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What stood out to you most in this message? How did God speak to you?***
- 2. Why should we look back through the Old Testament Covenants to prepare for Advent? Why is that important?***
- 3. We made several connections between the Old Testament Creation Covenant and the mission of Jesus. Which of these connected most with you? Why? Do you see any connections that we missed?***
- 4. Today's Advent Candle and theme is Hope. How is the arrival of Jesus the embodiment of Hope for you?***

Application:

Advent begins with lighting the Hope candle, confessing that the arrival of Jesus fulfills our ultimate hope. But how? Take time each day this week to write out one hope you have for this Advent season. Ask Jesus to show you how he is the fulfillment.

Conclusion:

From the start of the story, JESUS has been the long awaited hope for Creation.





GOD WITH US:
An Advent Journey through the Story of Scripture

Week 2:
The Promise of Peace

Advent Candle:
Peace

Purpose:
The Advent arrival of Jesus fulfills the Promise of Peace.

Scripture Focus:
Genesis 15:1-6

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.

***I am your shield]
your very great reward.”***

But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.



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Sermon Introduction:

Today we continue our Advent journey through the Story of Scripture, exploring the pivotal Covenants of the Old Testament, as we anticipate the arrival of Jesus. This week, we step into the story of Abraham and Sarah, an unlikely pair to receive this promise of peace. But we know that we can never grasp the meaning of Jesus' arrival without knowing their story first.

Sermon Outline:

1. The Yearning of Peace

There are many words connected to the story of Abraham and Sarah. Faith, perseverance, failure, pain. But peace is not often the first word that comes to mind.

Their story starts with a migration away from his family home into an unknown future. "Go to the place I will show you" is the bulk of the direction he was given at the outset of this faith adventure. And it wouldn't get much easier from there. He would part ways with his fellow nomad and nephew, Lot, with Lot choosing for himself what appeared to be the better land. This would lead Lot right to the gates of Sodom Gomorrah, with Abraham left to rescue Lot from his enemies, God's judgment, and himself.

Together, Abraham and Sarah would walk the long and lonely road of infertility, a pain that is next to indescribable except to those who experience it. Yet this story at the core of Scripture shows that God sees and hears those who bear this pain. In his cosmic plan to redeem the world, he starts by answering the longing of one elderly couple. But when God promised them a miracle child in Genesis 15:1-6, they would still have to wait for 25 years to see it become reality.



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In that waiting, they would take matters into their hands, with Sarah convincing Abraham to expedite the promise with her servant Hagar. The result is Abraham's son, Ishmael, and Sarah's hatred for Hagar. God refuses to reject Hagar, seeing her in the throes of pain and blessing Ishmael in his own right. At the same time, God refuses to forget Sarah, reminding her that the promise was not only for Abraham, but for her as well. He gives her the long awaited promise and names him Isaac.

The broken brotherhood of Isaac and Ishmael would not stop with them. Division would continue to plague Abraham's family for generations, through Isaac's twin sons Jacob and Esau, Jacob's sons betraying their brother Joseph, all the way to the future Kingdom of Israel splitting into two rival nations.

2. The Promise of Peace

And yet, in the thick of all of this pain, longing, and division stands a promise of Peace. As he does throughout the grand story, God once again chooses a representative. He enters into a covenant with Abraham, promising to give him a son, whose offspring will bless the entire world. It is not only a promise to Abraham or for Abraham, but through Abraham on behalf of the world. As Abraham stands beneath a sea of constellations overhead, God's redemption plan is already moving toward the star of Bethlehem.

Through a family line of broken people and relationships, a Prince of Peace will one day come. And the betrayed, forgotten, rejected, prodigals will be brought into a reconciled relationship with God and each other through his reign of Peace. At Advent we remember the waiting and longing of Abraham and Sarah. We look around at our own broken stories. We long for the Promise of Peace to become reality through Jesus.



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3. The Scandal of Peace

This Covenant moment doesn't only come with a promise of peace in the future, but a picture of how it will be achieved. Immediately after Abraham received this word from the Lord, he was commanded to gather animals and given specific instructions to follow in Genesis 15:9-21. At first glance this looks like another Old Testament ritual of sacrifice. But the historical context tells us this dramatic scene mirrors the typical covenant rituals of the day. In the ancient Near East, when two parties entered into a covenant, they would seal their commitment in a similar way. They would cut animals in two parts (the actual adage was to 'cut a covenant') and place them on the ground with a path down the middle of the two halves. Then the lower and lesser party would pass between the halves, reciting the terms of the covenant. The ritual served as a stark and visual reminder of the serious nature of the commitment. The lesser party was essentially saying that if they broke the terms of the covenant, they would end up like those unfortunate animals.

The ancient readers of this Genesis 15:9-21 account would have recognized the familiar elements, and drawn the immediate conclusion that God was entering into a covenant with Abraham. But they would have been utterly shocked and scandalized by one key detail. In this account, it is the symbol of God's presence (the blazing torch and firepot) that passes between the animals, repeating the scope of the covenant promise. It should have been the lesser party, Abraham, putting his life on the line if he ever broke the covenant. But it is not. It is God who takes that upon himself.



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This is the Scandal of Peace. In choosing Abraham as his representative, entering into covenant for the sake of all of humanity, and promising to bring peace through his offspring, God puts his own life on line. Knowing that Abraham will fail like all the others, and that God would be faithful like he always is, God gives us an image of the future. Yes, there is the promise of peace. But there is the picture as well. Jesus will lay down his own life as a sacrifice for our sins, taking on the judgment that should be ours, and shed his blood on the cross for our salvation.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What stood out to you most in this message? How did God speak to you?***
- 2. We made several connections between the Old Testament Covenant with Abraham and the mission of Jesus. Which of these connected most with you? Why? Do you see any connections that we missed?***
- 3. Today's Advent Candle and theme is Peace. How is the arrival of Jesus the embodiment of Peace for you?***
- 4. Where do you need the Peace of Jesus to break through in your circumstances?***

Application:

When was the last time you stood outside and looked up at the stars? Take a moment this week to try that and reflect on God's promises made and fulfilled in your life.

Conclusion:

The Advent arrival of Jesus fulfills the Promise of Peace.

GOD WITH US:

An Advent Journey through the Story of Scripture



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Week 3:
The Joy of Rescue

Advent Candle:
Joy

Purpose:
The Advent arrival of Jesus brings the Joy of Rescue.

Scripture Focus:
Exodus 20:1-19

And God spoke all these words:

***“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery
“You shall have no other gods before me.***

***“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven
above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to
them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the
children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who
hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and
keep my commandments.***

***“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold
anyone guiltless who misuses his name.***

***“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do
all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you
shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or
female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in
six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in
them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath
day and made it holy.***



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“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”

Sermon Introduction:

Today we light the Advent candle of Joy, while we explore God’s Covenant with Moses. Can you already see the obvious connection? In the book of Exodus, God rescued Israel out of slavery in Egypt and established them as his covenant community by giving them his Law. This became their central identity as a people. Over and over, they would remember and recite this story, refusing to forget the joy of rescue. Through every trial and test ever after, this story reminded them of what was possible through their God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.



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Sermon Outline:

1. The Joy of Community

In this covenant God outlines what it looks like to be his people in the world. As the covenant with Abraham was designed to be a blessing for the whole world and not only Abraham, so this covenant is designed as a ripple effect of redemption. By following these commands, Israel will become a living parable and compelling image of God's heart on display.

But just as we have noted before, each of the core Old Testament covenants that we are exploring intentionally point ahead to the reality of Jesus. As beautiful as the 10 Commandments are, they are but a glimpse of the Great Commandment that Jesus will outline in his ministry to come. Jesus sums up the entire covenant law given to Moses in the twin impulses that make up the Great Commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself."

Take note how each of the 10 Commandments fall into this all encompassing covenant of love. Jesus has fulfilled all of the law by his arrival, life, death, and resurrection. By his grace he is forming us into a covenant community transformed by his holy love. He is shaping us into a picture of what it looks like to be his people in this world. Can the people around us see that Joy of Community in us?



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2. The Joy of Freedom

While the covenant law given to Moses shaped the daily life of the people of Israel, the story behind that covenant shaped their identity. The preface to the commands is a reminder where they have been and who brought them on the journey. God begins by saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Yahweh is the God who hears the cries of the enslaved and does something about it. As a people, they would never get over this joy of rescue. It produced in them a stubborn sense of hope even in the face of greatest tragedy and trial. It was core to their understanding of themselves and of God. It shaped the way they saw their past, present, and their future. It is one of the most epic stories in all of human history, across any culture, anywhere. And yet, for all of its glory, it was simply a shadow of the great rescue to come.

Today, as we light the Advent candle of joy, we remember our rescue as well. Like the people of Israel who awaited another deliverer and liberator like Moses, we know that longing is fulfilled in the arrival of Jesus.

We remember our story, and how we were once enslaved. Not in Egypt with physical chains, under the brutality of Pharaoh, bearing the oppression of that mighty empire. But we were once enslaved to sin. It was our exile, bound by its oppressive grip and strength. But Jesus faced down the empire of sin and proclaimed, "Let my people go!"



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Jesus is the long awaited arrival of liberation. He overthrew the power and plagues of sin, became the Passover lamb of sacrifice, so that we could be set free! He is our New Exodus! Because of him we can know the Joy of Rescue.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What stood out to you most in this message? How did God speak to you?***
- 2. We made several connections between the Old Testament Covenant with Moses and the mission of Jesus. Which of these connected most with you? Why? Do you see any connections that we missed?***
- 3. Today's Advent Candle and theme is Joy. How is the arrival of Jesus the embodiment of Joy for you?***
- 4. The people of Israel often retold their rescue story. What is yours? What is your testimony of Joy and Rescue?***

Application:

Remember and retell your story of rescue. How and when did Jesus rescue you? How did that change your life? Look for an opportunity to share that joy with at least one other person this week.

Conclusion:

The Advent arrival of Jesus brings the Joy of Rescue.

GOD WITH US:

An Advent Journey through the Story of Scripture

Week 4:

The Kingdom of Love

Advent Candle:

Love



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Purpose:

In Advent we celebrate the arrival of King Jesus, the long awaited Son of David and Son of God, who brings the Kingdom of Love.

Scripture Focus:

2 Samuel 7:1-17

After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."

But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:

"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'"



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***“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.*”**

***“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”*”**

Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

Sermon Introduction:

Once again, we have God choosing a representative and entering into a covenant with this person, for the blessing of humanity as a whole. King David was revered and loved by the Jewish people. And the covenant we find in this passage was an anchor of hope for generations of Israel's descendants, as they held to the promise that God would one day restore the kingdom of Israel and place a king out of David's own family line on the throne to reign forever. And the whole world would be blessed by this everlasting, overcoming Kingdom of Love.



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Sermon Outline:

1. David's Son will Build a House for God

Since the time of Moses, God made his dwelling among his people in the tabernacle. His very living presence setting up camp among the nomadic people as they made their way through the desert and into the promised land. But after generations of this, and seeing the establishment and advancement of the kingdom of Israel under David's reign, David decides it is time to build God a permanent house. After all, he is a king in a palace. How could he leave God living in a tent?

But God had another plan in mind. Because of the blood on David's hands by way of military conquest, God will not allow David to build this house for him. But he will raise up David's son to do that work. As we read this passage from the vantage point of Advent, we can see a pattern that is familiar in Old Testament prophecy. Repeatedly there are two planes on which the prophecies are fulfilled. There is the immediate historical context and the future/eternal context. In this prophecy, God is speaking directly about Solomon in the immediate historical context. David's own son will indeed build the temple that will become a global masterpiece of architecture and the local dwelling place of God himself. It is a prophecy that is fulfilled within the very lifetime of many who heard it first.

But then there is the second level of fulfillment as well. Not only will David's son Solomon build a temple for God, but another son of David will fulfill this prophecy in a future/eternal sense as well. This promise and covenant points ahead to the Advent moment, the arrival of Jesus, a son of David from his family line who will do more than build a temple. He will become the temple, God himself dwelling with us in flesh and blood.



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2. God will Build a House for David's Son

This covenant continues with an unexpected twist. God will allow David's son to build a house for him. But he won't stop there. God will build a house for David and his son.

Here we can see a creative play on words. God is not simply speaking of a physical dwelling place. He is using the term house to mean a legacy, a family line, and an ongoing kingdom marked by his love. This covenant is pointing ahead to the Advent moment, the arrival of Jesus at Christmas.

In Jesus, this covenant finds its fulfillment as he is born into the family line of David and even intentionally born in Bethlehem, David's own hometown. But the similarities will not stop there. He will go on to preach about the Kingdom of Love, clear language that would not have been missed by the Jewish people longing for the days of David again. He will gather around himself 12 disciples, reminding the Jewish people of the days of David when the 12 tribes of Israel were unified together as one nation. Jesus will declare himself to be the new temple, the presence of God among us. He will call himself the good shepherd,

reminding the people of the early obscurity of David. He will enter into Jerusalem being proclaimed as the king! And he will be the only one willing and able to face down the giants of sin and death, using an unconventional weapon—not sling and stone, but cross and blood.

Here in this Advent moment, we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the long awaited Son of David and Son of God, who fulfills the covenants of the past in ways beyond our wildest hopes. But even more, he invites us into the New Covenant, sealed through the cross and empty tomb, unleashing the Kingdom of Love.





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Reflection Questions:

- 1. What stood out to you most in this message? How did God speak to you?**
- 2. We made several connections between the Old Testament Covenant with David and the mission of Jesus. Which of these connected most with you? Why? Do you see any connections that we missed?**
- 3. Today's Advent Candle and theme is Love. How is the arrival of Jesus the embodiment of Love for you?**
- 4. Holiness is the unrivaled reign of King Jesus over our lives. Is there any area of your life that needs to be surrendered to him in a fresh way?**

Application:

Renew your allegiance and surrender to King Jesus. Ask him to advance his Kingdom of Love through the everyday acts of your life.

Conclusion:

In Advent we celebrate the arrival of King Jesus, the long awaited Son of David and Son of God, who brings the Kingdom of Love.

